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# WESLEY

## AND HIS CENTURY

*John Wesley*

# WESLEY

## AND HIS CENTURY

### A STUDY IN SPIRITUAL FORCES

BY THE

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# WESLEY AND HIS CENTURY

## PROEM

### WESLEY'S PLACE IN HISTORY

If John Wesley himself, the little, long-nosed, long-chinned, peremptory man who, on March 9, 1791, was carried to his grave by six poor men, "leaving behind him nothing but a good library of books, a well-worn clergyman's gown, a much-abused reputation, and—the Methodist Church," could return to this world just now, when so much admiring ink is being poured upon his head, he would probably be the most astonished man on the planet. For if Wesley has achieved fame, he never intended it. Seeley says that England conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind. And if Wesley built up one of the greatest of modern Churches, and supplied a new starting-point to modern religious history, it was with an entire absence of conscious intention.

For more than a generation after he died historians ignored Wesley, or they sniffed at him. He was accepted as a fanatic, visible to mankind for a moment on the crest of a wave of fanaticism, and then to be swallowed up, without either regret or recollection, of mere night. Literature refused to take him seriously. He was denied any claim to stand amongst the famous men of all time. But Wesley has at last come into the kingdom of his fame. The most splendid compliments paid to him to-day come not from those inside the Church he founded, but from those outside it. Leslie Stephen describes Wesley as the greatest captain of men of his century. Macaulay ridicules those writers of "books called histories of England" who failed to see that amongst

the events which have determined that history is the rise of Methodism. Wesley, he says, had "a genius for government not inferior to that of Richelieu"; Matthew Arnold gives nobler praise when he says he had "a genius for godliness." Southey, who wrote Wesley's Life without in the least understanding Wesley's secret, asserts him to be "the most influential mind of the last century; the man who will have produced the greatest effects, centuries or perhaps millenniums hence, if the present race of men should continue so long." Buckle calls him "the first of ecclesiastical statesmen." Lecky says that the humble meeting in Aldersgate Street where John Wesley was converted "forms an epoch in English history"; and he adds that the religious revolution begun in England by the preaching of the Wesleys is "of greater historic importance than all the splendid victories by land and sea won under Pitt." Wesley, he holds, was one of the chief forces that saved England from a revolution such as France knew. "No other man," says Augustine Birrell, "did such a life's work for England; you cannot cut him out of our national life."

England, in a word, is as truly interested in Wesley as in Shakespeare. And, since the forces which stream from religion are mightier than anything literature knows, it is a reasonable theory that, in determining the history of the English-speaking race, Wesley counts for more than Shakespeare.

What was there, then, in Wesley himself, or what is there in his work, to justify compliments so splendid, and from authorities so diverse?

Wesley's least monument, in a sense, is the Church he built; and yet the scale and stateliness of that Church are not easily realised, nor the rich energy of growth which beats in its life. When Wesley died in 1791 his "societies" in Great Britain numbered 76,000 members, with 300 preachers. To-day, Methodism—taking its four great divisions in Great Britain, Canada, the United States, and Australasia—has 49,000 ministers in its pulpits, and some 30,000,000 hearers in its pews. It has built 88,000 separate churches; it teaches in its schools every Sunday more than 8,000,000 children. The branches of Methodism, in some respects, are more vigorous than even the

parent stock. In Canada, out of a population of less than 6,000,000, nearly 1,000,000 are Methodists. Every ninth person in Australasia belongs to Wesley's Church. It is, in some respects at least, the most vigorous form of Protestantism in the world. The Methodist Church of the United States raised £4,000,000 as a centenary effort—the largest sum raised by a single Church in a single effort in Christian history.

Time is a rough critic; it dissolves like some powerful acid all shams. But the Church that Wesley founded does more than barely survive this test. A century after Wesley died, it is well-nigh a hundred-fold greater than when he left it.

And yet Wesley's true monument, we repeat, is not the Church that bears his name. It is the England of the twentieth century! Nay, it is the whole changed temper of the modern world: the new ideals in its politics, the new spirit in its religion, the new standard in its philanthropy. Who wants to understand Wesley's work must contrast the moral temper of the eighteenth century with that of the twentieth century; for one of the greatest personal factors in producing the wonderful change discoverable is Wesley himself.

In some respects the eighteenth century is the most ill-used period in English history. It is the Cinderella of the centuries. Nobody has a good word to say about it. Carlyle sums it up in a bitter phrase: "Soul extinct; stomach well alive." Yet a century cannot be condensed into an epigram, least of all into one written in gall. The eighteenth century suffers because we set it in a false perspective. We compare it with the centuries which come after it, not with those which went before it. Its records, no doubt, look drab-coloured when set between the English revolution of the seventeenth century, which destroyed the Stuarts, and the French revolution of the nineteenth century, which cast out the Bourbons. But we may not be unjust, even to a century! The eighteenth century is, for England, a chain of great names and of great events. It found England, Scotland, and Ireland separate kingdoms; it left them united. If it took from us the United States, it gave us Canada, India, and Australia. If Lord North ruled England for twelve sad

years during its course, William Pitt ruled it for twenty years of splendour. If it saw a British Admiral shot on his own quarter-deck for cowardice, and a British fleet in open mutiny at the Nore, it also saw the great sea victories of Rodney at the Battle of the Saints, of Lord Howe on the first of June, and of Nelson at the Nile. Blenheim was fought the year after Wesley was born, and the Nile seven years after his death. The century between such events cannot have been inglorious. It was certainly a century of social and political growth. The England of George III. and of Pitt is a vast advance on the England of Queen Anne and of Walpole.

The real scandal of England in the eighteenth century, the leprosy that poisoned its blood, the black spot on the shining disc of its history, is the general decay of religion which marked its first fifty years. At the point of its faith England was dying. Its spiritual skies were black as with the gloom of an Arctic midnight, and chilly as with Arctic frosts.

Only by an effort of the historic imagination can we realise the condition of England in 1703. When Wesley was born, men still lived who had seen Judge Jeffreys on the bench, Titus Oates in the witness-box, and the Seven Bishops in the dock. Montesquieu, who studied the England of that age through keen French eyes, says bluntly : "There is no such thing as religion in England." That, of course, was not true; Epworth parsonage itself disproves it, and there must have been many English homes like that of which Susannah Wesley was the mother. But that saying of the keen-sighted Frenchman had a dreadful measure of truth in it. Christianity under English skies was never, before or since, so near the death point. Who does not remember the sentences which Bishop Butler, that gloomy, subtle, powerful intellect, prefixed to his "Analogy"? "It has somehow come to be taken for granted," he wrote, "that Christianity is not so much a subject of inquiry, but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. . . . Men treat it as if in the present age this were an agreed point amongst all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject to mirth and ridicule." Betwixt Montesquieu and Butler, the great Frenchman and

the still greater Englishman, what a procession of witnesses might be quoted in proof of the decay of faith in Great Britain at the beginning of the eighteenth century! And when faith dies, what else can live?

Who wants to see the morality of that period will find it reflected in the art of Hogarth, the politics of Walpole, the writings of Mrs. Aphra Behn, or of Smollett, and the pleasures of the Medmenham Club. It is registered in the foulness of the literature of the day, in the cruelty of its laws, in the despair of its religion. Christianity cannot perish; but it came near its death-swoon in that sad age. "There was," says Green, the historian, "open revolt against religion and against Churches in both extremes of English society. The poor were ignorant and brutal to a degree impossible now to realise; the rich, to an almost utter disbelief of religion, linked a foulness of life now happily almost inconceivable."

Then there came the Great Revival! The most wonderful movement in the history of the eighteenth century; its greatest gift to the English-speaking race, is nothing in the realm of politics, or of literature, or of science; it is not the rise of the middle classes, which shifted the centre of political power; or the great industrial awakening, which multiplied the wealth of the nation tenfold. It is the re-birth of its religion! And it is this of which Wesley is at once the symbol and the cause.

That revival was the translation into English life, and into happier terms, of Luther's Reformation in Germany. Wycliffe's reforms had no root; the Reformation in the days of Henry VIII. had almost worse than no root. It was political and non-moral. The true awakening of the religious life of the English-speaking race dates from Wesley. To say that he re-shaped the conscience of England is true, but is only half the truth. He re-created it! It was dead—twice dead; and through his lips God breathed into it the breath of life again. The pulse of John Wesley is felt to-day in every form of English religion. His fire burns in all our philanthropy! "The Methodists themselves," to quote Green once more, "were the least result of the Methodist revival. Its action on the Church broke the lethargy of the clergy; its noblest result is the steady attempt which has never

ceased from that day to this to remedy the guilt, the ignorance, the physical suffering, the social degradation of the profligate and the poor. . . . The great revival reformed our prisons, abolished the slave trade, taught clemency to our penal laws, gave the first impulse to popular education."

But what was Wesley's secret? By what strange magic did he work a miracle so great? It is a great deed to create a new Church, and perhaps a harder thing still to reform a Church both old and dead. How did Wesley accomplish both feats? The answer to this question is found in the history told in these pages. But let it be said at once that it is idle to seek the reason merely in some endowment of personal genius. The compliments paid to Wesley are often mere blunders. He was not, as Buckle calls him, "the first of ecclesiastical statesmen" —a Leo X. in a Geneva gown. He did not possess "the strongest mind of his century," as Southey thought. Coleridge's oft-urged criticism is at least partly true; he had the logical, but not the philosophical mind. He had nothing of Bunyan's dreamy genius; he could not compare in sweep and range of thought with the author of the "Analogy"; and, to come to later names and times, he had not Newman's subtle and profound intellect. The secret of his work is not to be found in the close-wrought and magnificent ecclesiastical machinery with which he endowed his Church. The characteristic institutions of Methodism were not the causes of the great revival; they are its results. And Wesley invented no new doctrine. He added to Christian knowledge no new truth. "I simply teach," he himself said, "the plain old religion of the Church of England"; truths, as he again put it, "which were merely the common, fundamental teaching of Christianity." And that is perfectly true. Wesley did not re-discover Christianity. He did not disturb it with a new heresy, or adorn it with a new doctrine. He did not even set the old doctrines in a new perspective.

The fatal thing in the religion of that age was that it had ceased to be a life, or to touch life. It was exhausted of its dynamic elements — the vision of a Redeeming Christ; the message of a present and personal

forgiveness. It was frozen into a theology; it was spun out into ecclesiastical forms; it was crystallised into a system of external ethics; it had become a mere adjunct to politics. No one imagined it, or thought of it, or tried to realise it, as a spiritual deliverance; a deliverance at the very touch of the fingers; a deliverance to be realised in the personal consciousness. Religion translated into terms of living human experience, and dwelling as a divine energy in the soul, was a forgotten thing. An electric lamp without the electric current is a mere loop of calcined fibres black and dead. And Christianity itself, in England, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was exactly such a circle of dead fibres. What Wesley did was to pour the mystic current of a divine life through the calcined soul of a nation, and so turn blackness into flame.

Wesley's secret, in brief, does not lie in his statesmanship, in his genius for organisation, or in his intellectual power. First and last it belongs to the spiritual realm. The energy that thrilled in his look, that breathed from his presence, that made his life a flame and his voice a spell, stands, in the last analysis, in the category of spiritual forces.

But all this only shows how lofty was the plane on which Wesley worked, and how great were the forces he represented. George Dawson, in his "Biographical Lectures," says: "I never can think of Wesley without associating him with the four glorious Johns of whom England ought to be proud — Wycliffe, the Reformer before the Reformation; Milton, the greatest soul England ever knew; Bunyan, the writer of the most blessed book next to the Bible that the world ever delighted in; Locke, who turned a clear understanding, an admirable education, and a pure conscience to putting that which was before a matter of feeling on the grounds of philosophy. Then comes Wesley, and, I believe, taking him altogether, Wesley was worthy to walk in the company of these four." But Dawson did not see that while Wesley had not the genius of Milton, or the luminous imagination of Bunyan, or the analytical intellect of Locke, he has yet left a deeper mark on English history than the other three Johns put together!

There are men who live in history because they embodied the ruling ideas of their age and made them victorious. There are men of yet loftier force, who may be said, not to reflect, but to create, the impulses which governed the world in which they lived. They shaped their epoch; they were not shaped by it. Napoleon was of the first type. He did not create the Revolution. He became its political heir and embodiment. Cæsar was of the other and greater order. He did not merely find a new channel for the currents of Roman history; he changed the very direction of their flow. By force of genius he gave to the history and political order of Rome a new physiognomy.

Wesley, too—if he is to be judged by the scale and permanence of his work—belongs to this greater type. He was not merely the interpreter of his age, the accidental figurehead of a spiritual revolution which was set in movement independently of him, the human centre round which crystallised impulses vaguely stirring in a thousand lives. He did not reflect his century; he wrought it to a new pattern. He set its pulses moving to the rhythm of a new life. He was, as a matter of fact, in quarrel with the essential temper of his age. But he bent that temper to his own. He set in motion forces which changed the religious history of England.

Wesley, to sum up, was great; great in mere scale and range of intellect; greater than his generation knew, or than even his own Church yet realises. No one can study Wesley's life and work without an ever-deepening sense of the scale of the man, compared with other notable figures in history. But Wesley's work was greater than Wesley himself; and it was greater because its secret lies in the spiritual realm.

And it is exactly this that makes his story an inspiration for all time. The supreme gifts of the intellect are incommunicable. Shakespeare's creative genius, Dante's piercing imagination, Darwin's gift for combining a thousand apparently unrelated facts into one triumphant generalisation, Wellington's faculty for guessing "what there was on the other side of the hill"—all these came by original endowment of nature. They were gifts, not acquirements. But the great forces and endowments of

the spiritual realm do not depend on the gifts or denials of nature. Their secret is not hidden in the convolutions of the grey matter of the brain. They depend on spiritual conditions; so they lie within the reach of common men.

And Wesley's secret, we repeat, lies at this point. Great as was his work, yet the explanation of it all is both near and simple. And to realise this at the outset is the one condition that makes the story of Wesley's life worth reading and worth writing.

Yes! across even what it is the fashion to call the leanness of the eighteenth century runs a golden chain of mighty names. Marlborough—he won Blenheim the year after Wesley was born—stands at its beginning; the man who behind the mask of his serene face hid the most terrible fighting gifts English history, at least, has known; Nelson and Wellington stand at its close. Among the figures still visible to history in the century are the two Pitts—haughty father and still haughtier son; Wolfe with his sky-tilted nose, who gave us America; Clive, with his sullen brows, who won for us India; and Canning, who called the new world into existence to redress the balance of the old. Its record in literature is splendid; it ranges from Swift and Addison, Johnson and Goldsmith, Pope and Gibbon, to Byron and Burns, to Coleridge and Wordsworth. Isaac Newton is its representative in science; Burke and Pitt in statesmanship; Wilberforce in philanthropy. Yet, in that crowd of great faces, the one which represents the force which has most profoundly affected English history is the long-nosed, clear-complexioned face of John Wesley, with its eager eyes, and masterful chin, and flowing locks.

It is sometimes claimed that Newman, who was born ten years after Wesley died, has influenced the religious life of his country as deeply as he. A convinced Protestant, of course, must be forgiven for holding that Newman's influence, on the whole, was evil, and not good. But, apart from this, it must be remembered that, of his ninety years, Newman threw the first forty-five into the scales of the Anglican Church, and the last forty-five into the scales of the Roman Catholic Church. Neither can claim him as a whole. He spent the first half of his life in

protesting against one Church, and the second half of his life in protesting against the other. George Washington is the only name in the record of the eighteenth century which rivals that of Wesley in its influence on our race, and Wesley represents the more enduring energy.

All this may be claimed for Wesley, not because he outshone the men of his century in genius, but because he dealt with loftier forces than they. Who awakens the great energies of religion, touches the elemental force in human life; a force deeper than politics, loftier than literature, and wider than science. Wesley worked in a realm through which blew airs from eternity!

# BOOK I

## THE MAKING OF A MAN

# CHAPTER I

## HOME FORCES

JOHN WESLEY came of a notable stock. His ancestors for three generations were gentlefolk by birth, scholars by training, clergymen by choice, and martyrs, in a sense, by roughness of fortune. They belonged to a hard age; an age of ejectments and proscriptions, when intolerance was crystallised into Acts of Parliament, and even mistook itself for religion. Daniel Defoe sat thrice in the public stocks in the very year John Wesley was born—for no worse crime than having written that matchless bit of irony, "A Short and Easy Way with the Dissenters"!

A very bitter storm of legalised cruelty beat on the Wesleys of that time. Bartholomew Wesley, the great-grandfather of John, was thrust out from his snug Dorsetshire rectory, in advance of the general ejection under the Act of Uniformity, in 1662. His son, John, a more brilliant scholar than even his father, but of less toughness of fibre, was imprisoned in 1661, just before his father's ejection, for not using the Book of Common Prayer. He was turned out of his living at Blandford in 1662, and lived a harried, distressful life under the cruel laws of the period afterwards. His natural home was Weymouth; but he was forbidden to settle there. A good woman, guilty of giving him lodgings, was fined £20 for the offence. "Often disturbed, several times apprehended, four times imprisoned," runs his patient, melancholy record. Under the infamous Five Mile Act he was driven from one place after another, and he died, a comparatively young man, killed by the cruel temper of his times.

His son, Samuel Wesley, the father of John, had all the essential virtues of his stock—their passion for scholarship, their courage, their independent will; but

he was of a hardier temper than his father. His independence of will took a somewhat surprising development. This son and grandson of ejected ministers decided that the Church which had ejected them was in the right, and he joined its ministry—thus turning his back on two generations of ill-used kinsfolk! He was, at the moment, at a Dissenting academy, a lad scarcely of age; but the form of dissent about him might well shock a youth of serious and generous temper. It was only a bitter variety of politics, absolutely exhausted of religious ideals and forces; and Samuel Wesley renounced it, trudged on foot to Oxford, with exactly forty-five shillings in his pocket, and entered himself at Exeter College as a "poor scholar."

About that very time, in London, the thirteen-year-old daughter of a famous Dissenting clergyman was putting her learned father, and his theology, in the scales of her girlish judgment, and solemnly deciding against both it and him! This sturdy youth, trudging in the winter weather to Oxford, with such scanty coins in his pocket, but such high purpose in his heart, and this remarkable theologian in short dresses, had not yet met; but they were destined to be man and wife. There were, plainly, some very notable affinities of nature betwixt them. When they met and mated their offspring might well be expected to possess some unusual qualities.

The total amount of assistance Samuel Wesley received from his family during his university course consisted of five shillings; but he emerged, at the end, with a degree, and £10, 15s. in cash in his pocket! On the whole no student perhaps ever gave less to Oxford or got more out of it than did Samuel Wesley. In Scottish universities generations of hardy students have cultivated much literature on very little oatmeal; but all the universities north of the Tweed might be challenged to produce an example of scholarship nourished on scantier cash or a more Spartan diet than that of Samuel Wesley.

He held a London curacy for a year, was chaplain on board a king's ship for another year, won the chaplainship of a regiment by a poem on the Battle of Blenheim, and lost it, according to one account, by publishing an

attack on Dissenters. He was given the living at Epworth to which was afterwards added the neighbouring parish of Wroot.

John Wesley's father, even at this distance of time, kindles a half-humorous, half-exasperated admiration. He was a little, restless-eyed, irascible man; high-minded, quick-brained, of infinite hardihood and courage, but with an impracticable, not to say irresponsible, strain in his blood. He was determined—in spite of nature—to be a poet; and on his poetry, Pope, though his friend, finds time, in the "Dunciad," to distil a drop of gall. His son John—who knew bad poetry when he saw it—says of his father's "Life of Christ" in verse—filial piety contending in him with literary judgment—"the cuts are good; the notes pretty good; the verses so-and-so." Praise of more frosty temperature it is difficult to imagine. Samuel Wesley's great work was a commentary on the Book of Job, a performance which would have supplied a new exercise in patience to that much-afflicted patriarch, if he had been required to read it. "Poor Job!" says Bishop Warburton; "it was his eternal fate to be persecuted by his friends."

Wesley's clear-eyed wife, who loved her impracticable and hot-tempered spouse with an affection all husbands may well envy, yet admits that amongst his rough parishioners at Epworth the talents of her husband were buried, and says, with wifely gentleness, he was "forced to a way of life for which he is not so well qualified as I could wish." But this was only a wife's soft periphrase. Her impracticable husband was busy hammering out laborious rhymes in his study, or was riding off to hold debate with his brother clergymen in Convocation, leaving his clearer-brained wife to manage the parish, cultivate the glebe, and govern her too-numerous brood of infants.

Susannah Wesley, his wife, would have been a remarkable woman in any age or country. She was the daughter of Dr. Annesley, himself an ejected divine, and a man of ripe learning and good family. The daughter of such a father had a natural bias for scholarship; she knew Greek, Latin, French, while yet in her teens, was saturated with theology, reasoned herself into Socinianism

—and out of it—and, generally, had a taste for abstruse knowledge, which in these soft-fibred modern days is almost unintelligible.

She was reading the Early Fathers and wrestling with metaphysical subtleties when a girl of to-day would be playing tennis or practising sonatas. While yet only thirteen years of age, as we have seen, she solemnly reviewed "the whole issue in dispute betwixt Dissent and the Church," and gravely decided that the views held by her father—and such a father!—were wrong. A feminine theologian of such tender years, who felt herself capable of deciding such an issue, and who actually decided it in such a way, and against such authorities, would be regarded in these days as a somewhat alarming portent. None but a blue-stocking, it might be confidently assumed—a dowdy in spectacles, with neglected dress and non-existent complexion, from whom suitors fled—would be capable of such a feat. As a matter of fact, Susannah Annesley was a beautiful, high-spirited girl—her sister was painted by Lely as one of the beauties of his time—keen-witted, but modest; with a genius for practical affairs. She was certainly neither dowdy nor blue-stocking; and was probably the most capable woman in all England in her day.

When only nineteen years old she married Samuel Wesley; and bore him nineteen children in twenty-one years. She was herself the twenty-fifth child of her father. It was an age of small incomes and large families!

She was an ideal wife, incomparably superior to her husband in practical genius, and yet herself lovingly blind to the fact. She might have talked philosophy with Hypatia or discussed Latin and Greek with Lady Jane Grey; and yet with her impetuous, unpractical husband she was as patient—if not quite as submissive—as Griselda. They were a strong-willed pair, accustomed to think for themselves; and she wrote to her son John afterwards, "It is a misfortune almost peculiar to our family that your father and I seldom think alike." It may be taken for granted, however, that when they differed the wife was usually in the right. Yet she practised towards her husband the sweetest wifely obedience.

That pugnacious little divine very properly expended many of his leaden stanzas on his wife:—

> "She graced my humble roof and blessed my life;
> Blessed me by a far greater name than wife.
> Yet still I bore an undisputed sway;
> Nor was't her task, but pleasure, to obey.
>
> . . . . .
>
> Nor did I for her care ungrateful prove,
> But only used my power to show my love;
> Whate'er she asked I gave without reproach or grudge;
> For still she reason asked, and I was judge.
> All my commands requests at her fair hands,
> And her requests to me were all commands."

These are heavy-footed rhymes; and the actual prose of married life usually comes short of its poetry. The rector of Epworth discovered one fatal day that his wife, who had her own political views, did not join in the response when he offered prayer for the king.

"Sukie," he said majestically, "if we are to have two kings, we must have two beds"; and the little, absolute, irresponsible, and exasperating man took horse and rode away, leaving his wife to care for his children and his parish. According to Southey—though the tale is doubtful—she did not hear of him again till twelve months afterwards, when William III. died, and the hot-headed rector of Epworth came back condescendingly to the bosom of his family!

The courageous pair began their wedded life on a curacy and an income of £30 a year; and children came fast—nineteen, as we have seen, in twenty-one years. So poverty—always darkened with the shadow of debt, and sometimes trembling on the edge of want—was a constant element of the family life. Years later, in a letter to his bishop, Mr. Wesley gives him the interesting information that he had but £50 a year for six or seven years together, and "one child at least per annum." The little rector of Epworth, indeed, was fond of doing exercises in what may be called family arithmetic for the edification of his diocesan. In a letter to his Archbishop, announcing the birth of twins, he says: "Last night my wife brought

me a *few* children. There are but two yet, a boy and a girl, and I think they are all at present. We have had four in two years and a day, three of which are living . . . Wednesday evening my wife and I joined stocks, which came to but six shillings, to send for coals."

A father who, with only six shillings in his pocket, has to welcome the arrival of twins might be pardoned for feeling some anxiety. But the head of the Wesley household left that branch of family duty, as he did most others, to his wife. She carried the burden of household care; her husband could betake himself either to Convocation, or to a debtors' prison, in a spirit of most cheerful philosophy. He wrote to the Archbishop of York, when the gates of Lincoln Castle had just been shut on him: "Now I am at rest; for I have come to the haven where I have long expected to be." He adds incidentally: "When I came here my stock was but little above ten shillings, and my wife at home had scarce so much." It does not seem to have occurred to this remarkable husband that a wife left with a brood of little children, and less than ten shillings in her possession, had almost sharper cause for anxiety than he had. She could hardly sit down and write philosophically: "Now I am at rest." He adds: "She soon sent me her rings, because she had nothing else to relieve me with; but I returned them."

Only once was there audible in his brave wife's voice a repining note. While her husband was still lying in prison for debt, the Archbishop of York asked her:

"Tell me, Mrs. Wesley, whether you were ever really in want of bread?"

"My lord," she answered, "strictly speaking, I never did want bread. But then I had so much care to get it before it was eaten, and to pay for it after, as has often made it very unpleasant to me; and I think to have bread under such terms is the next degree of wretchedness to having none at all."

In later years Mrs. Wesley writes of the "inconceivable distress" from which they not seldom suffered in those sad days; one of the daughters, Emilia, speaks with sharper accents of the "intolerable want" of the family,

and of the "scandalous want of necessaries" which not seldom afflicted them.

Samuel Wesley did, no doubt, manage his financial affairs very badly. He understood practically the whole sad philosophy of debt. "I am always called on for money before I make it," he wrote, "and must buy everything at the worst hand." But he lacked common-sense in money matters. His household was divided by very thin partitions, indeed, from mere want; and yet this surprising husband and father could spend no less than £150 in thrice attending Convocation! He was very sensitive, however, to any impeachment of his thrift and care as the head of his family; and, to his brother-in-law, who attacked him bluntly on the subject, and quoted Scripture on the uncomfortable thesis that he who failed to provide for his own household was worse than an infidel, offered the following record of his business affairs. The figures have a delicious and characteristic confusion about them, and might well be the despair of an accountant; and yet they show that if the little impatient man had never learnt the art of living within his income, he contrived to exist on surprisingly small means. It is all written, it will be observed, in the third person:—

| | £ | s. | d. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Imprimis, when he first walked to Oxford, he had in cash | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| He lived there till he took his Bachelor's degree, without any preferment or assistance, except one crown | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| By God's blessing on his own industry he brought to London | 10 | 15 | 0 |
| When he came to London, he got deacon's orders and a cure, for which he had for one year | 28 | 0 | 0 |
| In which year, for his board, ordination, and habit he was indebted £30, which he afterwards paid | 30 | 0 | 0 |
| Then he went to sea, where he had, for one year, £70, not paid till two years after his return | 70 | 0 | 0 |
| He then got a curacy at £30 per annum, for two years, and by his own industry, in writing, &c., he made it £60 per annum | 120 | 0 | 0 |

Was there ever a worse tangled bit of arithmetic! And yet behind the confused figures there shines a gallant spirit!

In a letter to his Archbishop, Samuel Wesley makes a frank but quite unnecessary confession of his want of business knowledge: "I doubt not but one reason of my being sunk so far is my not understanding worldly affairs, and my aversion to law, which my people have always known but too well. I had but fifty pounds per annum for six or seven years together, nothing to begin the world with, one child at least per annum, and my wife sick for half that time."

To all his other ills must be added Samuel Wesley's quarrels with his neighbours, bred, in the main, of political disputes, and amongst that rough peasantry taking a very rough shape. They maimed his cattle, destroyed his crops, assailed his character, tried to set fire to his rectory. His tithes could be collected only in patches, and often by force. But the little plucky man had at least the virtue of courage. "They have only wounded me yet," he said, "and, I believe, can't kill me." The whole relation betwixt priest and parishioners was of a very curious and troubled sort.

Susannah Wesley was a mother of a very notable type, and her management of her children may well be the despair of all mothers and the envy of all fathers to the end of time. This brave, wise, high-bred woman, with the brain of a theologian behind her gentle eyes, and the tastes of a scholar in her blood, had great ideals for her children. They should be gentlefolk, scholars, Christians. Her motherhood had an inexorable plan running through it; and never were the innumerable offices of a mother discharged with such insistent method and intelligent purpose. The whole household life moved as if to a time-table. The very sleep of the children was measured to them in doses. As each child reached a certain fixed date in its life it was required, within a certain specified time, to learn the alphabet. This wise mother understood that the will lies at the root of the character, and determines it. The Wesley household was richly endowed in the matter of will, so the first step in each child's education was to bring that force under government. It was a standing and imperative rule that no child was to have anything it cried for, and the moral effect on the child's mind of the discovery that the one infallible way of *not*

getting a desirable thing was to cry for it must have been surprising.

The children were taught to be courteous in speech; to cry softly when it was necessary to cry at all—and sometimes this best of all mothers supplied her children with excellent reasons for crying.

Mrs. Wesley carried her principle of method and a time-table into the realm of religion. She began surprisingly early. "The children were early made to distinguish the Sabbath from other days, and were soon taught to be still at family prayers, and to ask a blessing immediately afterwards, *which they used to do by signs, before they could kneel or speak!*" The cells of each infantile brain were diligently stored with passages of Scripture, hymns, collects, &c. Prayer was woven into the fabric of every day's life. The daily lesson of each child was set in a framework of hymns. Later, certain fixed hours were assigned to each member of the household, during which the mother talked with the particular child for whom that hour was set aside. It is probable that those rigours of introspection, that severity of self-analysis, which formed the habit of Wesley's life in after years had their origin in those Thursday interviews which Mrs. Wesley had with "Jackie."

Mr. Birrell accuses Mrs. Wesley of hardness. She was, he says, "a stern, forbidding, almost an unfeeling parent." Mr. Lecky says the home at Epworth parsonage "was not a happy one." But no criticism could well be more unjust. Life had not been soft to Mrs. Wesley; the age was not soft. A strain of the Spartan mother was in her blood, and not without need. A very narrow space divided that household of hungry mouths at Epworth from real want. When Susannah Wesley awoke every morning, her first preoccupation must have been how to find bread for her hungry brood. These were conditions unfavourable to light-hearted ease. But no one can study the records of that home without seeing that its atmosphere was love. Love, it is true, of a strenuous temper, with no element in it of loitering tenderness, and no enervating strain of indulgence; but still love of deathless quality. John Wesley himself was the least sentimental of men; but his affection for his mother had

something in it of a lover's glow and tenderness. He writes to her hoping he may die first, and so not have the distress of outliving her!

It is possible to challenge some of Mrs. Wesley's methods; and there is a tragical side to the family history. Out of her nineteen children nearly one-half died in infancy; and of her seven clever, quick-witted girls, five made very unhappy marriages. But great risks lie like a shadow on all human homes.

The only charge which can be fairly urged against Susannah Wesley is that she had no sense of humour. The very names of the children prove the complete absence of any sense of the ridiculous in either the rector of Epworth or his wife. One daughter was cruelly labelled Mehetabel; a second Jedidah! Mrs. Susannah Wesley's theological performances while yet in short dresses prove her want of humour. A girl of thirteen, who took herself solemnly enough to undertake the settlement of "the whole question betwixt Dissent and the Church" must have been of an unsmiling and owl-like gravity. Now, humour has many wholesome offices. It acts like a salt to the intellect, and keeps it sweet. It enables its owner to see the relative sizes of things. It gives an exquisite tact, a dainty lightness of touch to the intellectual powers. And Mrs. Wesley visibly lacked any rich endowment of that fine grace.

## CHAPTER II

### THE WESLEY HOUSEHOLD

THE Wesley family, as we have described it, was a household of strong natures, strongly ruled, and ruled to noble ends. A cluster of bright, vehement, argumentative boys and girls, living by a clean and high code, and on the plainest fare; but drilled to soft tones, to pretty formal courtesies; with learning as an ideal, duty as an atmosphere, and the fear of God as a law. Religion in the home was, as it ought to be in every home, the master-force; a force that had the close and constant pressure of an atmosphere. It was not, it is true—and as subsequent pages will show—the most intelligent form of religion. It created an atmosphere through which ran no golden sunshine, and in which few birds sang. Still it fulfilled its eternal office of ennobling the lives it touched.

And on the whole, it may be confidently asserted that at that particular period of the eighteenth century, more brains could be found beneath the thatch of Epworth Parsonage than under any other roof in England. The elder Wesley, indeed, suggests—if only by his simplicity, his wrong-headed unpracticality—Dr. Primrose in the "Vicar of Wakefield"; and, it may be added, he must have been a much less comfortable man to live with than Goldsmith's amiable, if too simple-minded, hero. But he had a clever brain, an energetic will, and courage enough for a grenadier battalion! He was no doubt of a peremptory temper. A will, stubborn by hereditary gift, had been hardened by a perpetual duel with adverse circumstances, till it was almost incapable of yielding. In his house he was a despot, but this was only the fashion of the times. Susannah Wesley, in her letters to her friends, was accustomed to describe her lordly little husband as "My Master," though, as is often the case in married life, the majestic husband had much less authority than he himself

imagined. The children, when they wrote to their father, addressed him as "Honoured Sir."

Mr. Quiller-Couch, in his "Hetty Wesley," however, draws a portrait of the father of the Wesley household which is simply a caricature. Samuel Wesley, as he pictures him, with hot, ferret eyes, set close together on either side of his long, obstinate nose, is a sort of eighteenth-century Quilp in a cassock. He is a deeply and justly hated domestic tyrant, the evil genius of his children's lives. Even the wise, gentle-browed Susannah Wesley is described as fit to shape the lives of her great sons, but as a curiously helpless mother for her daughters. In "Hetty Wesley" is a scene in which Molly, the most timid and shrinking of the Wesley girls, faces her terrible father, and scolds him through whole paragraphs. "Your temper," she informs her father, in sentences which suggest Dr. Johnson, "makes life a torture. Thwarted abroad, you have drunk of power at home till you have come to persuade yourself that our souls are yours." And she ends by pointing her finger at her father, and shrieking, "Look at him, a ridiculous little man."

That scene is false, both in fact and in art. There is no echo of the household speech of the century in that passage, still less of the accent of the Epworth Rectory. Samuel Wesley was not too wise as a father, but few men ever made greater sacrifices for their children, or were more completely bound up in their happiness. And what other wife and mother of that age can be put beside Susannah Wesley? She is one of the famous women of all time. Of her three boys, one was destined to mould to a new type the religious life of the race to which he belonged; a second was to be the greatest hymn-writer in English literature; while the eldest of the group, Samuel, had a strength of will and vigour of intellect equal to his more famous brothers, and a wit even keener. Unfortunately, in his case, no thaw ever came to the benumbing frost of High Church theology which lay upon him.

The girls of the rectory had, of course, a tamer and less varied life than their brothers. The sons went early to the noise and stir of a great public school, to the learned atmosphere of the University, and, later still, to

the open stage of the great world itself. And, as was natural, the imagination of both father and mother followed the boys into those new realms with keenest interest. Their figures took a new scale in the domestic landscape. For the girls remained nothing but the tameness of home-life; and the life of a country rectory, set, as Epworth was, in the desolate fenlands, and in the middle of the eighteenth century, must have been tame. Nature was unkind to it. Life moved slowly, and was filled with commonplace tasks. They had a preoccupied and impracticable father, an overburdened mother, a half-furnished house, and a very inadequate income. Suitors were scanty; new dresses were an idle dream, hard work was inevitable. The girls did not possess—and could hardly be blamed for not possessing—the wise philosophy of their mother. Emilia, the oldest of the girls, and the least contented, talks shrewishly and often of the scandalous insufficiency of things upon which they had to live.

The flat, melancholy fenlands, pricked with thin lines of pollard willows and alders, and seamed with dikes through which the sluggish waters crept—dikes which in winter became mere ribbons of ice—all this made a desolate landscape, over which, in winter, the bitter south-east winds raged. Here and there a distant church spire showed like the point of a spear against the sky-line; a low cluster of village roofs, a solitary farmhouse, gave a sharper accent to the desolation of the scene. The stubborn fen-men did not take kindly to those who, like the Wesleys, were not of their stock. Fifty years earlier the surly breed had waged thinly disguised civil war with the Dutch engineer, Cornelius Vermuyden, whom William of Orange brought over to drain the ancient fens. They broke down his dams, beat his workmen, burnt his crops; and they had something of the same mood towards the Wesleys. They stabbed the little rector's cows, maimed his sheep, broke the dams at night to flood his little fields. They harried him for his debts, tried, not unsuccessfully, to burn his parsonage over his head. Then they accused him of having set fire to it himself!

He was urged by his friends to leave Epworth, but nobody with the Wesley blood in his veins was capable

of being driven anywhither. "It is like a coward," Samuel Wesley wrote to his bishop, "to desert my post because the enemy fire thick upon me." He was writing from prison, into which he had been cast on account of his debts. It may be frankly admitted that these were not very happy domestic conditions. They meant many cares and a narrow social horizon for the Epworth household.

The family history of the Epworth Parsonage, it may be added, was blackened by not a few tragedies, and these all clustered round the bright, clever girls of the household. There are worse evils than want, sharper ills than poverty, things harder to bear than either pain or death. Few mothers have had keener griefs than Susannah Wesley. The single cry of pain, indeed, audible in all her correspondence is a passage in a letter to her brother Annesley:—

"I am rarely in health; Mr. Wesley declines apace; my dear Emily, who in my present exigencies would exceedingly comfort me, is compelled to go to service in Lincoln, where she is a teacher in a boarding-school; my second daughter, Sukey, a pretty woman, and worthy a better fate, when, by your last unkind letters, she perceived that all her hopes in you were frustrated, rashly threw herself upon a man (if a man he may be called who is little inferior to the apostate angels in wickedness) that is not only her plague, but a constant affliction to the family. Oh, sir! Oh, brother! happy, thrice happy are you, happy is my sister, that buried your children in infancy: secure from temptation, secure from guilt, secure from want or shame, or loss of friends! They are safe beyond the reach of pain or sense of misery; being gone hence, nothing can touch them further. Believe me, sir, it is better to mourn ten children dead than one living; and I have buried many."

The vague, bitter, nameless reference here is to her daughter Hetty, the keenest spirit, the liveliest, brightest, and most unhappy of that cluster of fair girls under the roof of the Epworth Parsonage. Hetty had rare gifts of intellect, and it is recorded of her that she could read the Greek Testament by the time she was eight years of age. A brilliant, fascinating girl, with a strain of gay and half impish mischief in her, she was self-willed and masterful in spirit; and yet no girl under any English

roof at that moment had a more tender spirit, a quicker intelligence, or perhaps a sadder fate. She was the one daughter who brought shame upon the household.

When her shame was known her father broke into fierce, inexorable anger. For long he would not see his daughter; but for the mother's patience, she might have been driven from the household roof. Hetty herself, years afterwards, when her father was partially reconciled, wrote: "I would have given at least one of my eyes for the liberty of throwing myself at your feet before I was married at all; yet since it is past, and matrimonial grievances are usually irreparable, I hope you will condescend to be so far of my opinion as to own that, since upon some accounts I am happier than I deserve, it is best to say little of things quite past remedy."

The only quarrel John Wesley ever had with his father arose out of a sermon he preached on "The Charity Due to Wicked Persons," which his father held to have been preached on Hetty's behalf and levelled against himself.

In a reckless mood—a mood half of contrition and half of desperation—Hetty vowed to marry any person her parents wished, and that self-imposed penance was ruthlessly exacted. A journeyman plumber named Wright offered himself, the father's wrath was still flaming, and the marriage took place. Never, perhaps, was a more unhappy union. Wright, in character, education, habits, and temper, was the exact opposite of his wife. It was the marriage of a clever, refined, high-spirited girl to a drunken and dissolute boor. She was a neglected wife, an exiled daughter, an unhappy mother, for her children died almost at the moment of their birth. One of the most beautiful and pathetic poems of its kind is a piece entitled "A Mother's Address to Her Dying Infant," which Hetty wrote by the deathbed of her little infant:—

"Tender softness! infant mild!
Perfect, purest, brightest child!
Transient lustre! Beauteous clay!
Smiling wonder of a day!
Ere the last convulsive start
Rend thy unresisting heart;

Ere the long-enduring swoon
Weigh thy precious eyelids down;
Ah, regard a mother's moan,
Anguish dèeper than thy own!
Fairest eyes! whose dawning light
Late with rapture blest my sight,
Ere your orbs extinguished be,
Bend their trembling beams on me!
Drooping sweetness! verdant flower,
Blooming, withering in an hour!
Ere thy gentle breast sustains
Latest, fiercest, mortal pains,
Hear a suppliant! Let me be
Partner in thy destiny."

If we add to these verses the words—spelt as in the original—which Hetty's husband wrote to John Wesley enclosing the lines, the interval in mind and education betwixt husband and wife can be understood:—

"I've sen you Sum Verses that my wife maid of Dear Lamb Let me hear from one or both of you as Soon as you think Conveniant."

Her wedded life, sown thick with every kind of grief, broke the unhappy Hetty's spirits, and she sought, with pathetic eagerness, for her angry little father's forgiveness.

"Honoured Sir (she wrote), although you have cast me off, and I know that a determination once taken by you is not easily moved, I must tell you that some word of your forgiving is not only necessary to me, but would make happier the marriage in which, as you compelled it, you must still (I think) feel no small concern. My child, on whose frail help I had counted to make our life more supportable to my husband and myself, is dead. Should God give and take away another, I can never escape the thought that my father's intercession might have prevailed against His wrath, which I shall then, alas! take to be manifest.

"Forgive me, sir, that I make you a party in such happiness (or unhappiness) as the world generally allows to be, under God, a portion for two. But as you planted my matrimonial bliss, so you cannot run away from my prayer when I beseech you to water it with a little kindness. My brothers will report to you what they have seen of my way of life and my daily struggle to redeem the past. But I have come to a point where I feel your forgiveness to be necessary to me. I beseech you, then, not to withhold it."

Samuel Wesley, however, listened with unconvinced ears. He found no true note of sincerity in his unhappy daughter's letters. He advised her, in her next letter, if she wishes to convince him, to "display less wit and more evidence of self-examination." "What hurt," he asks, "has matrimony done you? I know only that it has given you your good name." A mother, of course, would not have replied in such a fashion to such a letter as poor Hetty had written, but then Samuel Wesley had something more than an average man's inability to understand feminine sensibilities.

But sorrow, poverty, neglect, and loneliness, if they broke the once gay Hetty's pride, refined her character. She wrote to her brother John in 1743:—

"Though I am cut off from all human help or ministry, I am not without assistance; though I have no spiritual friend, nor ever had one yet, except, perhaps, once in a year or two, when I have seen one of my brothers or some other religious person by stealth, yet (no thanks to me) I am enabled to seek Him still, and to be satisfied with nothing else than God, in whose presence I affirm this truth. I dare not desire health, only patience, resignation, and the spirit of a healthful mind. I have been so long weak that I know not how long my trial may last, but I have a firm persuasion and blessed hope (though no full assurance) that in the country I am going to I shall not sing 'Hallelujah!' and 'Holy, holy, holy!' without company, as I have done in this."

Wesley's last record of his sister is inexpressibly, if unconsciously, touching: "1750, March 5. I prayed by my sister Wright, a gracious, tender, trembling soul; a bruised reed, which the Lord will not break. I had sweet fellowship with her in explaining at the chapel those solemn words: 'Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.'"

Let there be set against the background of that record the picture of the high-spirited, bright-witted girl, the sunshine and the pride of the rectory before she was stained by shame or broken by human cruelty, and what a pathetic chapter in the history of the Wesley family becomes visible!

Another daughter, Martha, had a fate almost as cruel as that of Hetty, though, in her case, there was no personal fault to add gall to it. Martha was married to one of Wesley's Oxford comrades, Westley Hall, a clergyman, a man of good family, but whose character had in it unsuspected depths of vileness. Adam Clarke sums up his history: "He was," he says, "a curate in the Church of England, who became a Moravian, a Quietist, a Deist (if not an Atheist), and a Polygamist, which last he defended in his teaching and illustrated by his practice." Hall fell in love with Keziah Wesley, and announced that it had been revealed to him that he must marry her. His affection—and his revelations—however, were of a very transferable quality. He presently cast his evil eyes on Martha, and reported a further revelation that he must marry *her*. The neglected Keziah died broken-hearted; upon Martha fell what proved to be the worse fate of marrying Hall.

Hall had a genius for sustained deceit and for cruelty, which almost suggests diabolical possession. Patty, as a girl, was the most frolicsome of the whole Epworth group. "You will all be more serious some day," said the wise mother, looking at her laughing children with prophetic eyes. "Shall *I* be more serious, mum?" asked Patty. "No," said the mother with a smile. Nothing, she thought, could cloud the bright spirit of *that* girl! And yet this merriest of girls had to wade through black floods of suffering. She developed a gentle and heroic patience which outshone that of Tennyson's Griselda. She covered her vile husband's faults, nursed his mistresses, took into pitying arms his illegitimate children, clung to him with heroic fidelity. When her worthless husband, years afterwards, died, almost his last words were, "I have injured an angel, an angel that never reproached me."

And yet his wronged wife's heroic meekness did not represent any want of either courage or strength. She kept her intellect bright, wore a serene face amid all troubles, and by the sheer charm of her mental qualities became one of Dr. Johnson's most intimate and valued companions. "Evil," she once said, "was not kept from me, but evil has been kept from harming me." If her life was a tragedy, her death was marked by a strange

peace. Just before she died, her niece asked her if she were in pain? "No," she said, "but a new feeling. I have the assurance which I have long prayed for. Shout!" she whispered eagerly, and so she died. It would be difficult to find in the records of womanhood another example of a spirit so sorely tried, yet so serenely heroic, as that of Patty Wesley.

Yet another of the Wesley girls, Susanna, wrecked her happiness in marriage. She had the misfortune to choose a husband so atrocious in character that she was compelled to leave him. Marriage for the Wesley household was a curiously perilous experiment. All these tragedies, however, lay as yet, unguessed, in the vague and distant future.

# CHAPTER III

## HOUSEHOLD STORIES

Some of the incidents of Wesley's childhood must have deeply coloured his religion. One is the historic fire which consumed the rectory in 1709, when Wesley was not yet six years old. The building was old and dry, constructed of lath and plaster and ancient timber. On the midnight of February 9, 1709, it was discovered to be in flames. The fire raced along the woodwork of the ancient rectory as though it had been so much tinder. The rest of the household made a hurried and scorched escape, but John, in the alarm and hurry, was forgotten.

The little fellow awoke to find the room so full of light that he thought it was day; he lifted his head and looked through the curtains. A red scribble of fire was racing across the ceiling! He sprang from the bed and ran to the door, but it was already a dreadful tapestry of dancing flames. He climbed on a chest which stood beneath the window and looked out. The night was black, but the light of the burning house fell on the upturned faces of a swaying crowd of agitated people. The strong north-east wind, blowing through the open door, had turned the staircase into a tunnel of flame; the father found it would be death to climb it. He fell on his knees in the hall, and cried aloud to God for the child that seemed shut up in a prison of flame.

Mrs. Wesley herself, who was ill, had—to use her own phrase—"waded through the fire," and reached the street, with scorched hands and face; as she turned to look back at the house the face of her little son could be seen at the window. He was still in the burning house!

There was no ladder; his escape seemed impossible. The boy himself heard behind him the crackling flames, and saw before him the staring, white-faced crowd, framed against the background of the black night.

One man, with more resource than the rest of the crowd, ran in beneath the window, and bade another climb upon his shoulders. The boy was reached and, just as he was drawn through the window, he heard the crash of the falling roof behind him. "Come, neighbours," cried the father, when his child was brought to him, "let us kneel down! Let us give thanks to God! He has given me all my eight children. Let the house go. I am rich enough."

No child of six could ever forget an incident like that. It burned itself in upon the boy's imagination. In later years it became for him luminous with new and strange meanings. It was a parable of his own spiritual history. He had been delivered from fiercer fires than those which consumed Epworth Rectory. Was he not "a brand plucked from the burning"; and plucked for some special purpose? Nay, the incident became a mystic picture of the condition of the whole world, and of the part he was to play in it.

His theology translated itself into the terms of that night scene. The burning house was the symbol of a perishing world. Each human soul, in Wesley's thought, was represented by that fire-girt child, with the flames of sin, and of that divine and eternal anger which unrepenting sin kindles, closing round it. He who had been plucked from the burning house at midnight must pluck men from the flames of a more dreadful fire. That remembered peril coloured Wesley's imagination to his dying day.

The story of the fire is told by the rector himself, by Mrs. Wesley, and by John, from his boyish recollection. Of these three accounts, the most graphic and vivid is that by Samuel Wesley himself, though, curiously enough, it is the account generally overlooked. As it is read, something of the confusion, the heat, the terror of the fire can be realised across nearly two centuries:—

"A little after eleven (he writes) I heard 'Fire!' cried in the street next to which I lay. If I had been in my own chamber, as usual, we had all been lost. I threw myself out of bed, got on my waistcoat and nightgown and looked out of the window; saw the reflection of the flame, but knew not where it was; ran to my

wife's chamber with one stocking on, and my breeches in my hand; would have broken open the door, which was bolted within, but could not. My two eldest children were with her. They rose, and ran towards the staircase, to raise the rest of the house. Here I saw it was my own house, all in a light blaze, and nothing but a door between the flame and the staircase.

"I ran back to my wife, who by this time had got out of bed, and opened the door. I bade her fly for her life. We had a little silver and some gold, about £20. She would have stayed for it, but I pushed her out. I ran upstairs and found them, came down, and opened the street door. The thatch was fallen in all on fire. The north-east wind drove all the sheets of flame in my face, as if reverberated in a lamp. I got twice on the steps, and was drove down again. I ran to the garden-door and opened it. The fire was there more moderate. I bade them all follow, but found only two with me, and the maid with another (Charles) in her arms that cannot go; but all naked. I ran with him to my house of office in the garden, out of the reach of the flames; put the least in the other's lap; and not finding my wife follow me, ran back into the house to seek her, but could not find her.

"I ran down, and went to my children in the garden, to help them over the wall. When I was without, I heard one of my poor lambs, left still above-stairs, about six years old, cry out, dismally, 'Help me.' I ran in again, to go upstairs, but the staircase was now all afire. I tried to force my way up through it a second time, holding my breeches over my head, but the stream of fire beat me down. I thought I had done my duty; went out of the house to that part of my family I had saved, in the garden, with the killing cry of my child in my ears. I made them all kneel down, and we prayed to God to receive his soul.

"I ran about inquiring for my wife and other children; met the chief man and the chief constable of the town going from my house, not towards it, to help me. I took him by the hand and said, 'God's will be done!' His answer was: 'Will you never have done your tricks? You fired your house once before; did you not get enough by it then, that you have done it again?' This was cold comfort. I said, 'God forgive you!' But I had a little better soon after, hearing that my wife was saved, and then I fell on mother earth and blessed God.

"I went to her. She was alive, and could just speak. She thought I had perished, and so did all the rest, not having seen me nor any share of eight children for a quarter of an hour; and by this time all the chambers and everything was consumed to ashes, for the fire was stronger than a furnace, the violent wind beating it down on the house. She told me afterwards how she

escaped. When I first went to open the back-door, she endeavoured to force through the fire at the fore-door, but was struck back twice to the ground. She thought to have died there, but prayed to Christ to help her. She found new strength, got up alone, and waded through two or three yards of flame, the fire on the ground being up to her knees. She had nothing on but her shoes and a wrapping-gown, and one coat on her arm. This she wrapped about her breast, and got safe through into the yard, but no soul yet to help her. She never looked up or spake till I came; only when they brought her last child to her, bade them lay it on the bed. This was the lad whom I heard cry in the house, but God saved him by almost a miracle. He only was forgot by the servants, in the hurry. He ran to the window towards the yard, stood upon a chair, and cried for help. There were now a few people gathered, one of whom, who loved me, helped up another to the window. The child, seeing a man come into the window, was frightened, and ran away to get to his mother's chamber. He could not open the door, so ran back again. The man was fallen down from the window, and all the bed and hangings in the room where he was were blazing. They helped up the man a second time, and poor Jacky leaped into his arms and was saved. I could not believe it till I had kissed him two or three times."

The next day, as he was walking in the garden, and surveying the ruins of the house, he picked up part of a leaf of his Polyglot Bible, on which these words were still legible: "*Vade; vende omnia quæ habes; et attolle crucem, et sequere me*"—"Go; sell all that thou hast; and take up thy cross, and follow Me."

Is it any wonder that such an experience registered itself ineffaceably on John Wesley's imagination? Wesley, as a child, must have watched with grave, wondering eyes another incident in the Epworth household. The father was absent at Convocation; and Mrs. Wesley began to hold religious meetings in the rectory kitchen. She held these little services first for her own servants and children; then the neighbours begged permission to come, till thirty or forty were gathered on Sunday evening. That fiery little High Churchman, her husband, heard the news. A "conventicle" was held under the roof of his own rectory, with a woman publicly praying, and even, perhaps, exhorting; and that woman his own wife! Here was matter to set the sacerdotal conscience on fire

with austere anger! Mrs. Wesley's letters, in reply to her imperious husband, are models of sense and goodness, and her logic is quite too much for that irascible little man.

It "looked particular," her husband argued, if she held a service. "I grant it does," his wife replies, "and so does almost anything that is serious, or that may in any way advance the glory of God or the salvation of souls, if it be performed out of a pulpit." Then, too, her sex made it unsuitable, her husband contended, that she should conduct such a meeting. "As I am a woman," Mrs. Wesley replies, "so I am also mistress of a large family; and though the superior charge of the souls contained in it lies upon you, as head of the family, and as their minister, yet in your absence I cannot but look upon every soul you leave under my care as a talent committed to me under a trust by the great Lord of all the families of heaven and earth. And if I am unfaithful to Him, or to you, how shall I answer when He shall command me to render an account of my stewardship?"

"Why did she not ask some one else to read a sermon?" Mr. Wesley demanded. "Alas!" she replies, "you do not consider what a people these are. I do not think one man among them could read a sermon without spelling a good part of it; and how would that edify the rest?" As for its being a conventicle, a rival of the church, "these little gatherings," Mrs. Wesley tells her husband, "have brought more people to church than ever anything else did in so short a time. We used not to have above twenty or twenty-five at evening service, whereas now we have between 200 and 300."

Mrs. Wesley's modesty is charming. "I never durst positively to presume to hope that God would make use of me as an instrument in doing good. The furthest I ever durst go was: It may be! Who can tell? With God all things are possible. I will resign myself to Him; or, as Herbert better expresses it:—

> 'Only since God doth often make
> Of lowly matter for high uses meet
> I throw me at His feet.
> There will I lie until my Master seek
> For some mean stuff whereon to show His skill;
> Then is my time.'"

Mrs. Wesley closes with a note of fine dignity. "If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me that you desire me to do this; for that will not satisfy my conscience. But send me your positive command, in such full and express terms as may absolve me from guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity for doing good when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ."

That terrible sentence was too much for the little rector, and the meetings were continued until he returned from London.

But the whole incident, it can well be imagined, must have deeply impressed John Wesley, who then was only nine years old. The figure of his mother standing before that crowd of peasant listeners, the grave, sweet, high-bred face, in such vivid contrast with every other face in the room; the example of serious but intense zeal; the controversy with the father; the questions—the very questions he had himself to settle later, and on a larger field—which was of greater importance, decorous form or spiritual fact? whether it was wrong to do good if the method of doing it was irregular; did human souls exist for the sake of ecclesiastical forms, or ecclesiastical forms for the sake of human souls? The whole incident, we repeat, with the controversy it kindled, must have profoundly impressed Wesley. And his mother's fine persistency and courageous zeal must have helped to determine the whole policy of his own life in after years.

Meanwhile, on the lively household at Epworth there broke one of the oddest experiences that ever visited a bewildered rector's family circle—the performances of that poltergeist—noisy ghost, or imp—familiarly named by the girls of the household "Old Jeffrey." Who does not know the story of "Old Jeffrey" has missed one of the best attested and most curious ghost stories in literature.

For nearly six months—from December 1716 to April 1717—the rectory was made hideously vocal with mysterious noises, raps on doors and walls, thumps beneath the floor, the smash of broken crockery, the rattle of iron chains, the jingle of falling coins, the tread of

mysterious feet. The noises baffled all more prosaic explanations and were at last assigned by common consent to some restless spirit; they became a sound so familiar that they ceased to be annoying, and the lively girls of the parsonage labelled the unseen, but too audible, sprite "Old Jeffrey."

The story is told in letters, in amplest detail, and by every member of the family in turn, and all the tales were collected by John Wesley himself—who was at the Charterhouse when "Old Jeffrey" was active—and published in the *Arminian Magazine*. There is an element of humour in the varying tones in which the marvellous tale is recited. The rector tells it with masculine directness, and a belief in the ghost which plainly breeds, not fear, but only anger, and a desire to come to close quarters with it, and even to thump it. Mrs. Wesley tells the story, after her practical fashion, with Defoe-like simplicity; the quick-witted girls tell the tale with touches of girlish imagination and humour; a neighbouring clergyman, who was called in to assist in suppressing the ghost, adds his heavy voice to the chorus. The evidence, if it were given in a court of law, and in a trial for murder, would suffice to hang any man.

Some of the performances of the ghost were of a thrilling character. Mrs. Wesley, walking hand in hand with her husband, at midnight, downstairs to the room whence the noises came, records that "a large pot of money seemed to be poured out at my waist, and to run jingling down my nightgown to my feet." More than once the indignant rector felt himself actually pushed by some invisible force. When the sounds were first heard it was noticed that the slumbering children, who were unconscious of the sound, were trembling with agitation and terror in their very sleep; and Mr. Wesley, with fatherly indignation, demanded why the ghost disturbed innocent children, and challenged it to meet him in his study if it had anything to say to him. He walked off majestically to his study to meet the ghost, and found the door held against him.

The girls discovered, by-and-by, that they could make "Old Jeffrey" angry by making personal remarks about it, ascribing its performances to rats, &c.; whereupon it would

thump the floor and walls with huge indignation. "Old Jeffrey" was a ghost with pronounced political views, and would kick the floor or walls with noisy energy when Mr. Wesley prayed for the king. But the rector's loyal sentiments were not to be repressed by a mere Jacobite ghost, and he would repeat the prayer for King George I. in yet more defiant tones. Samuel Wesley offered on this the sensible reflection, "Were I the king myself, I should rather Old Nick should be my enemy than my friend." Mr. Wesley pursued the noise into almost every room in the house, chased it into the garden; tried to open a conversation with the ghost, engaged the services of a mastiff to put it down, but when the ghost began to discourse the dog tried ignobly to get under the bed in sheer terror. Once he made elaborate preparations for shooting it, but was prevented by a fellow divine, who was watching with him, reminding him that lead could not hurt a spirit. It was a punctual ghost, and generally began its performances a little before ten o'clock; and the girls came at last to accept it as an intimation that it was "time to go to sleep." "A gentle tapping at their bed-head," John Wesley records, "usually began between nine and ten at night: they then commonly said to each other, 'Jeffrey is coming; it is time to go to sleep.'"

"Old Jeffrey," it may be added, was the most polite and considerate of poltergeists known to literature. When it was "on duty," it would lift the latches of the doors as the girls approached them to pass through. Mrs. Wesley, in her literal fashion, appealed to the invisible imp not to disturb her from five to six, as that was her quiet hour, and to suspend all noise while she was at her devotions; and "Old Jeffrey," the most gentlemanly of ghosts, respected her wishes, and suspended his noisy operations during these periods.

The knocking in one particular chamber was especially violent one night; Mr. Wesley went into the room and adjured the spirit in vain to speak. He then said, "These spirits love darkness. Put out the candle, and perhaps it will speak." His daughter Nancy did so, and the rector repeated his adjuration through the darkness; but there was only knocking in reply. Upon this he said, "Nancy, two Christians are an overmatch for the devil;

go you down stairs. It may be when I am alone he will have courage to speak." When the girl was gone he said, "If thou art the spirit of my son Samuel I pray thee knock three knocks and no more." Immediately all was silence and there was no more knocking that night.

The performances of this queer poltergeist in Epworth Parsonage have, of course, their parallel in many similar stories; and what explanation of them is possible? Mrs. Wesley, after her direct and practical fashion, tried "Old Jeffrey" by the test of his utility, and pronounced against him. "If these apparitions," she said, "would instruct us how to avoid danger, or put us in the way of being wiser and better, there would be sense in it. But to appear for no end that we know of, unless to frighten people almost out of their wits, seems altogether unreasonable." A very foolish ghost is "Old Jeffrey," according to Mrs. Wesley!

Coleridge discovers in the Wesley family "an angry and damnatory predetermination" to believe in the ghost, a view which is in hopeless quarrel with the facts. "The noises," he says, "were purely subjective, and partook of the nature of a contagious nervous disease"—an explanation which respect for a great name need not prevent any one from calling childish. "Old Jeffrey," it is clear, was too much for the philosophy of S. T. C. There are many explanations of "Old Jeffrey." Dr. Salmon accuses Hetty Wesley of playing tricks on her family and producing all the noises; but Mr. Andrew Lang, an authority on ghosts and their performances, writes a long article in the *Contemporary*, in defence of Hetty, and decides that she "did not, in top boots, invade the room of her father's serving man and frighten his mastiff into howls." Priestley offers the theory of imposture by servants and neighbours; Isaac Taylor resolves "Old Jeffrey" into a monkey-like "buffooning droll" of a spirit. Mr. Wesley had preached for several Sundays against the "cunning men" of the neighbourhood, whom the ignorant peasants used to consult as a kind of wizards; and Mr. Andrew Lang thinks the performances of "Old Jeffrey" were the revenge taken by these "cunning men."

Samuel Wesley, the eldest son of the household, offers the best judgment on the story, and he puts it in the form of an unconscious, but very respectable, epigram. "Wit,

I fancy," he says, "might find many interpretations, but wisdom none." The modern reader, we suspect, will take the side of "wisdom."

"Old Jeffrey" belongs to the class of queer phenomena that baffle explanation, but the story undoubtedly coloured John Wesley's imagination. It, to use Mr. Andrew Lang's phrase, "made a thoroughfare for the supernatural through his brain." It predisposed him not, it is true, to believe in all ghost stories, but to expect them; to listen to them with alert attention; to record them; to treat them respectfully. He tells a hundred ghost stories in his "Journal," and always has towards them the same mental attitude of keenest interest, a respect for the witnesses, and an open mind as to any explanation.

According to one tradition, it may be added, "Old Jeffrey" revisited his familiar haunts nearly a century later; and an incumbent of less hardy courage than that possessed by the Wesley household was actually driven from the Epworth Rectory by strange, persistent, and utterly unaccountable noises.

# CHAPTER IV

## PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

In the sober and ordered household life of the Epworth Rectory John Wesley grew up a grave, silent, patient boy, with meditative brow and reflective ways, and an invincible habit of requiring a reason for everything he was told to do. "I profess, sweetheart," said the hot-tempered little rector to his wife, "I think our Jack would not eat his dinner unless he could give a reason for it." The boy had a strain of stoical silence and endurance in him even at that tender age. In 1712 he, with four of the other children, had the smallpox, the common and dreaded plague of that time. His mother writes: "Jack has borne his disease bravely like a man, indeed, like a Christian; though he seemed angry at the pustules when they were sore, as we guessed by his looking sourly at them, for he never said anything."

The boy's gravity of temper, and what may be called his religious docility, were so marked that when he was not yet eight years of age his father—always disposed to do things in a hurry—admitted him to the Lord's Supper. His mother, with the finer prescience that love gives to a mother, saw in her second son the hint of some great, unguessed future, and she writes in her diary under the head of "Evening, May 17, 1717, Son John":—

> "What shall I render to the Lord for all His mercies? I would offer myself and all that Thou hast given me; and I would resolve —O give me grace to do it!—that the residue of my life shall be all devoted to Thy service. And I do intend to be more particularly careful with the soul of this child, that Thou hast so mercifully provided for, than ever I have been; that I may instil into his mind the principles of true religion and virtue. Lord give me grace to do it sincerely and prudently."

In 1714 his father succeeded in procuring for him, from the Duke of Buckingham, a nomination to the Charterhouse; and thus, when not yet eleven years old, from the shelter of home—and such a home!—and from an atmosphere charged with prayer as with the fragrance of ever-burning incense, John Wesley stepped into the competitions and tumult of a great public school. The change of atmosphere and environment was great. The Charterhouse of that day was a school with great traditions and a decent standard of scholarship; but it was rough, not to say lawless, to a degree that can now hardly be realised. The hateful "fag" system prevailed in a very unsoftened form. The school, indeed, was a little patch of human society, exhausted, in some respects, of all civilised elements and governed by the ethics of the savage. The stronger and older boys systematically robbed the younger ones of their meat, and during the greater part of the six years Wesley spent in that school he suffered that daily and ignoble theft, and practically lived on bread.

A boy trained in the severities of Epworth Parsonage, however, could easily survive even the raided meals of the Charterhouse School. His father advised his son to run three times round the Charterhouse garden every morning; and the son obeyed that injunction with the literal fidelity characteristic of him. Every morning a little, lean, boyish figure might have been seen flying with nimble legs thrice round the Charterhouse garden. Wesley's hair when a boy was of an auburn tint, though it grew darker in later years; and the rich-tinted hair crowning the thin face, with its serious yet keen eyes, must have made a very interesting countenance. Spare diet and constant exercise in the keen morning air helped to endow Wesley with that amazing physical toughness which enabled him, when eighty-five years old, to walk six miles to a preaching appointment, and declare that the only sign of old age he felt was that "he could not walk nor run quite so fast as he once did."

That he was an ideal student — quick, tireless, methodical, frugal of time and sober of spirit—goes without saying. The son of Susannah Wesley, fresh from the touch of her diligent life, and with the breath of her

grave spirit still upon him, could hardly be anything else. And six years of strenuous, if somewhat rough and harsh, life at the famous school gave Wesley an ample foundation for his after studies. Life at a great public school, however, is something more than an education in books. No enervating softness is in its atmosphere. It develops courage, hardihood, self-reliance. It hardens all the fibres of the character. It is one long and bracing tonic. Wesley brought from the Charterhouse a tough body; but he brought from it, too, a certain toughness of character, an admirable possession for a youth of seventeen who is entering a great University, and such a University as Oxford was in the early years of the eighteenth century.

The oldest brother Samuel was at this period a teacher in Westminster School, where the youngest of the three, Charles, was a scholar; and John Wesley studied Hebrew under his elder brother; for the Wesleys had in an admirable degree the habit of helping each other. "Jack is with me," writes Samuel to his father, "and is a brave boy, learning Hebrew as fast as he can."

At this stage a piece of what seemed surprisingly good fortune visited the Epworth household. Charles Wesley was at Westminster, a lively schoolboy, with more than a schoolboy's gift for fighting, when an Irish gentleman, Garrett Wesley, rich and childless, wrote to the Epworth Rectory asking if there was a son of the house named Charles; if so, he desired to adopt him as his heir. There was some kinship of blood betwixt the two families, but its exact degree is not clear. Garrett Wesley seems to have actually contributed to the cost of his intended heir's education for some time, and finally wished to carry him off to Ireland and take the place of a father to him. Mr. Wesley left the decision of the matter to the boy himself, who declined the proposal; and Garrett Wesley chose as his heir another kinsman, Richard Colley, who assumed the name of Wesley, was raised to the peerage as Baron Mornington, and became the grandfather of the Duke of Wellington. Up to 1800 the most famous of British soldiers appears in the Army-list as "Arthur Wesley"; after that year the name is changed to Wellesley.

This seems to show that the saint and reformer who changed the course of the religious history of England by spiritual forces, and the great soldier who contributed such splendid victories to its secular history, sprang from the same family stock. And betwixt Wesley and Wellington are, no doubt, curious points of agreement. Both were little men, of the toughest physique, with an almost miraculous capacity for hard work, and with courage which, if it had the coolness of ice, had also the hardness of steel. Wellington's "Despatches" and Wesley's "Journal" have many characteristics in common — a certain stern directness, a scorn of ornament, a love for short words and clear thinking. If the portraits of the two men are studied there are odd points of resemblance. Each has the long, obstinate nose, the resolute chin, the steady, piercing eyes of a leader of men. But the countenance of the great preacher is refined and made gentle by the gospel of love he preached so long. The character of the famous soldier was moulded and tempered in the red furnace of Badajos and San Sebastian, of Busaco and of Waterloo. And the scars of the flames are on his face even in old age!

In 1720 John Wesley began his life at Oxford, entering Christ Church as a commoner on a Charterhouse scholarship of £40 a year. The Oxford of 1720 might have been pronounced, in advance, to be a singularly ungenial field for a clever lad of seventeen who took life very seriously, and who—though he was quite unconscious of it—was to be the agent under God of the greatest movement in the religious history of England. The Oxford of that day was sufficiently remote from the Oxford Matthew Arnold has painted in memorable words: "steeped in sentiment, spreading her gardens to the moonlight," and "whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Ages." There was no romance about the Oxford on which John Wesley looked with perplexed youthful eyes, and no atmosphere of "sentiment." In an age which counted "enthusiasm" the most deadly of sins the Universities were certain to suffer most: just as in a body in which the circulation of the blood is defective the extremities are the parts most affected. And Oxford at the beginning of the eighteenth century was perhaps the most

prosaic patch in the whole drab-coloured English landscape.

It had no "enthusiasms," not even for athletics! It was the home of insincerity and idleness and of the vices bred of such qualities. Its insincerity, too, was of a specially evil type. It was organised, endowed, made venerable, clothed with authority, and even mistook itself for virtue! All the formulæ of a great Christian seat of Christian learning existed; but the facts were in quarrel with the formulæ. Gibbon has cruelly embalmed, like a dead fly in the imperishable amber of his rhetoric, his own tutor who "remembered that he had a salary to receive and forgot that he had a duty to perform"; but this man was a type of the University itself. The professors drew salaries for lectures they never gave; the students bought dispensations for absence from lectures which were never delivered, and took oaths to obey laws which they never so much as read. Oxford, when Wesley trod its streets, was, for the average student, an education in the bad art of subscribing to articles he ridiculed, swearing to keep laws he ignored, and pretending to attend lectures which had no existence. Whoever wants to understand to what a depth it had sunk must read that terrible sermon which Wesley himself delivered in St. Mary's pulpit on St. Bartholomew's Day of 1744. That discourse is, in fact, a flaming indictment of the University, preached with infinite courage in the University pulpit itself, and to an audience of professors, fellows, heads of colleges, and students. It can hardly be wondered at that this sermon was the last Wesley was allowed to deliver in the historic pulpit of St. Mary's!

A whole University is not, of course, to be packed into a single generalisation. There was some good scholarship and a surviving element of wholesome life in even the Oxford of 1720–44; but no one can understand the evolution of Methodism in its primitive form at Oxford who does not realise the moral and intellectual atmosphere of the great University.

Wesley had a studious and successful, if not brilliant, career at Oxford. The atmosphere of the University did not enervate him; perhaps by some subtle law of reaction

it even made his industry more intense. He took his Bachelor's Degree in 1724 and was elected Fellow of Lincoln in 1725. A year later he was appointed lecturer in Greek and Moderator of the Classes. He took his Master's Degree in 1727.

Thus at twenty-two Wesley was a Fellow of the most scholarly, if almost the smallest, college in Oxford. His brother Samuel had a good position in Westminster School and was making powerful friends. Charles, his younger brother, only seventeen years old, had a scholarship at Christ Church. The sons of the Epworth Parsonage plainly promised to do better in the world than their hot-tempered, impracticable father.

And Oxford put upon John Wesley its ineffaceable mark. He was a University man, with the merits and the faults of the type, to the day of his death. He had mental faculties that worked with the exactitude of a machine. He excelled in logic, and was apt to resolve everything—even his own religious experience—into the terms of logic. He had a certain confident primness of manner, shone in argument and found delight in it. His literary style showed already the characteristics which brought him fame in later years. It was clear, terse, direct, and marked by a stern scorn of ornament and of mere verbal pyrotechnics. Wesley delighted in short words set in short sentences. His very brevity, indeed—his habit of taking the most direct road to his meaning, and of clothing his thoughts in the fewest possible syllables—had many of the effects of wit. He talked in epigrams without intending it, or even being conscious of it.

The youthful Fellow of Lincoln planned great things for his own future. That somewhat pompous announcement, "Leisure and I have taken leave of each other," belongs to this period of his life. It was translated into sober and humble fact later; but even at this stage he treated his degree not as the end, but as the starting-point of his life as a student. He distributed his hours on plan with characteristic thoroughness, so many being given to classics, so many to logic and ethics, so many to Hebrew and Arabic. Saturday was devoted to oratory and poetry, for already Wesley was making more or less

successful excursions into the fairyland of verse. "Make poetry your diversion," wrote his serious-minded mother, "but not your business."

A letter from a University chum, Robert Kirkham, gives a sort of keyhole glimpse of the secular Wesley, the young, precise, self-confident, argumentative Fellow of Lincoln. Kirkham addresses his friend as "Dear Jack," describes with undergraduate gusto a dinner of "calves' head and bacon, with some of the best green cabbages in the town." The dinner party "tapped a barrel of admirable cider"; and by way of relish to the calves' head and bacon, Wesley was informed, they discussed "your most deserving queer character, your little and handsome person, and your obliging and desirable conversation. You have often," Kirkham writes, "been in the thoughts of M. B., which I have curiously observed, when with her alone, by inward smiles and sighs, and abrupt expressions concerning you." "M. B." was Miss Betty Kirkham, the writer's sister, and the letter shows that the "little and handsome person" of the youthful Fellow of Lincoln already drew the regards of feminine eyes.

Wesley himself at this stage took an affectionate interest in his own personal appearance. He discusses with his brother Samuel, and with great seriousness, the question of whether he should wear his hair long or short. "As to my looks," he writes, "it would doubtless mend my complexion to have it [his hair] off, by letting me get a little more colour; and perhaps it might contribute to my making a more genteel appearance." But John Wesley, like John Gilpin's wife, was of a frugal mind, and he decided that the improvement in his looks did not supply sufficient grounds for expending two or three pounds a year in payments to a barber.

The fact is that debt pursued Wesley up to the very threshold of his Fellowship. His father writes to "Dear Mr. Fellow-elect of Lincoln," sending him £12 and saying, "I have done more than I could for you. I have not £5," he says, "to keep the family till after harvest. What will be my own fate, God only knows." The little man plainly had before his eyes the prospect of

paying another visit to Lincoln Castle in the capacity of a prisoner for debt. He writes, however, "Sed passi graviora." "Wherever I am, my Jack is Fellow of Lincoln!"

But a wave of deeper feeling was beginning to sweep through the channels of Wesley's life, and "M. B." with her sighs, and the hairdresser with his scissors, were soon submerged and lost for ever to human vision.

# BOOK II

## THE TRAINING OF A SAINT

# CHAPTER I

## CHILD PIETY

Religion is, of course, the supreme fact in John Wesley's life, the one thing that gives it historic and immortal interest. In the great realm of religion he found the forces which enabled him to write his signature so deeply on human history. In its service he did the work which has made his name famous for all time. Apart from the great revival in which he was the chief actor, he would, no doubt, have played a considerable part in the world of his day. A brain so clear and nimble, a body so tough, a figure so trim, a capacity for work so amazing, must have won for him success in any realm and under any conditions. Had he remained the prim High Churchman with a purely mechanical religion, he might have worn the lawn sleeves of a bishop, and his name would probably be carved to-day in fading letters on a tomb in some English cathedral. But in that case his sole title to human recollection would be a dozen arid volumes of controversial divinity. Wesley changed the very currents of English history; he gave a new development to English Protestantism, and so made himself visible for all time; and he was able to do this because he mastered the central, essential secret of religion and made his life the channel through which the great forces which belong to religion flowed into the life of his countrymen. And it is the religious history of John Wesley which still supremely concerns the world.

We have described the purely human and secular elements in his training up to this point, that his spiritual history may be told as a separate record, and so may be seen in unbroken perspective.

In a sense John Wesley's spiritual history is a curiously modern story, and Wesley himself, looked at religiously, is the most modern of men. In his biography

all the schools of the religious life of to-day are reflected and reproduced. Science reports that in the pre-natal stages of the human infant the whole physiological chain of existence, link by link, is, so to speak, rehearsed. So the stages of religious experience through which John Wesley passed cover the whole range of the religious moods and emotions which stir men's lives to-day.

We have what may be called the religion of childhood —the only religion some people ever know—a purely imitative thing, impressed on the life from without by force of discipline, the result of domestic training, but without any vital and spiritual root. We have the religion of the High Churchman, resolved into a machinery of external rules and maintained by external discipline; of the legalist, with all the saving elements of religion frozen into ice, and only its ethics left alive; of the ascetic, who tries to save his soul by afflicting his body— "salvation by starvation," as some wit has called it; of the mystic, who loses touch of solid ground and of homely duties and drifts away into some dim realm of fog.

All these types exist in Wesley. He tried all readings of religion; tried them earnestly; tried them with heroic thoroughness; spent thirteen years in the process—and found himself a spiritual bankrupt at the end!

He learned at last the deep, eternal secret of religion; religion as a present and personal deliverance; a deliverance verified in the consciousness and bringing the redeemed soul into terms of sonship with God; religion with its secret of power over sin; its great gift of a morality set on flame by love. And with that supreme discovery his life was transfigured. Wesley's religious experiences are thus "the history of a soul"; but they are much more. They are the story of great schools for religion reproduced within the boundaries of one earnest life. All the successive moods of Wesley's religious experience are alive to-day; they exist contemporaneously, as separate types of religion.

In Wesley's spiritual development, too, all these transitions of experience can be seen with crystalline clearness, they can be followed with unclouded certainty. His was a soul, in all its moods, set in crystal; and his habit of relentless self-analysis, the unreserve both of his letters

and of his immortal Journal, the exquisite simplicity of his style, make it possible to follow without effort all the stages of his religious evolution. He has throughout his whole life the frankness of Rousseau without his sly self-consciousness; and he moves, of course, in a realm so high that he seems to belong to another spiritual order than the famous Savoyard. Then, too, we have Wesley's self-judgments revised by himself at wide intervals both of time and of spiritual progress. Thus he sets his youth in the high lights, and tries it by the fervours, of his conversion. Later he retries both by the wise and sober judgment of his old age. So we have the Wesley, say, of 1728 judged by the Wesley of 1738; and both again re-judged by the Wesley of 1788. If ever it could be said of a human soul that it might be studied in detail, and under the microscope, this may be said of John Wesley.

Some of the elements of what may be called child-religion lie on the surface, and are easily described and assessed. A child acquires readily a crust of external habit, impressed by rule; a whole system of simple and undiscriminating beliefs—beliefs unequipped with proofs—unrelated, indeed, to the reason and accepted on authority. This docile, imitative piety is as external to the soul as the skin is to the body; but it has many of the useful offices of a skin.

Now all these elements of child-religion Wesley had in a very high degree. His mother's bent of character, her insistent and orderly discipline that shut round her children's lives like an atmosphere, and with something of the perpetual and resistless pressure of an atmosphere, was exactly calculated to produce that casing of habit which makes so large a part of the religion of a child. What theology the child learned was naturally of a High Church type. He was taught, for example, that his sins had been washed away in baptism, and in after years he records gravely that "not till I was about ten years old had I sinned away that washing of the Holy Ghost which was given me in baptism." He was further taught that he "could only be saved by keeping all the commandments of God"; a version of the Gospel of Christ which cost him afterwards years of suffering. The result of such discipline

and teaching on a nature predisposed to meditative gravity was to produce a childish piety of an abnormal and almost uncomfortable seriousness. But it so completely satisfied the sacerdotal ideals of his father that, as we have seen, when the boy was scarcely eight years old he made him kneel at the table of the Lord's Supper.

It was an age of wonderful children! Of Mrs. Wesley's father, afterwards Dr. Annesley, it is gravely recorded that "when about five or six years old he began a practice, which he afterwards continued, of reading twenty chapters every day in the Bible." The phenomenon of a child not six years old who solemnly forms, in the cells of his infantile brain, the plan of reading twenty chapters of the Bible every day—and sticks to it through a long life—would in these modern days be reckoned nothing less than astonishing. Of Hetty Wesley, the sister of John, it is on record that at eight years of age she could read the Greek Testament. Do any such wonderful children exist in these days?

Perhaps Wesley's own early and hot-house piety made him in later years too credulous of infantile saints; it helps, indeed, to explain his melancholy Kingswood experiment, when he tried, on a large scale, to transfigure boys of seven or eight and ten into middle-aged saints.

But some of the sweeter and more gracious elements of child-piety are conspicuously absent from John Wesley's childhood. The modern Church has happily learned to find in a little child's religion some beautiful and most enviable graces; a confident trust that outruns the metaphysics of great theologians; an easy, happy love of God, that might almost seem irreverent but for its very simplicity; a gladness in religion as spontaneous as the singing of the birds, and as sweet; a simplicity of prayer that makes a listening mother both weep and smile. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," says Wordsworth; and about a little child, breathing the air of a Christian home, does lie the heaven of a simple-hearted love of God and of a trust in Him on which no shadow of doubt can fall. Christ stands close to the child's heart. Nay, still as of old He sets the little child in the midst of His Church and warns us all that *that* way lies heaven!

Now these gracious elements of child-religion, glad, simple, and confident, John Wesley did not possess. They would have been for him an anachronism. They did not belong to his age, nor to the type of theology taught under the roof of Epworth parsonage. They formed no element in the measured, exact discipline—a discipline that dealt out hours and duties as a chemist counts the drops of a tincture—which was the best Mrs. Wesley herself, at this stage, knew. No child ever outruns the religion of its own mother; and if it was in one sense the merit, it was also the defect, of Susannah Wesley's piety that it was constructed on the principle of a railway time-table, and with something of its mechanical effort. This was the school in which she herself had been nurtured. Writing in 1709 to her eldest son, Samuel, who was then at Westminster, she says:—

"I will tell you what rule I used to observe when I was in my father's house and had as little, if not less, liberty than you have now. I used to allow myself as much time for recreation as I spent in private devotion. Not that I always spent so much, but I gave myself leave to go so far but no farther. So in all things else; appoint so much time for sleep, eating, company, &c."

Now a girl who prayed by the clock, and measured her prayers, and then allowed herself exactly so much time for "recreation" as she had spent in prayer and no more, certainly understood the seriousness of religion; but what did she know of its gracious freedom? And this was the general characteristic of Susannah Wesley's piety. There was an heroic fibre in it. It is impossible not to admire, almost with a touch of amazement, the resolute methods of her religion; its seriousness, its diligence, its energy of routine. This mother of nineteen children, for example—who had to be their teacher and almost their bread-winner, as well as their mother—yet resolutely spent one hour every morning and another every evening in prayer and meditation. In addition she generally stole another hour at noon for wholesome privacy, and was in the habit of writing down at such times her thoughts on great subjects. Many of these are still preserved, marked "Morning," "Noon," or "Evening"; and they have a certain loftiness of tone, a detachment from secular

interests nothing less than amazing. Airs from other worlds seem to stir in them. Here is one example:—

"*Evening.*—If to esteem and to have the highest reverence for Thee; if constantly and sincerely to acknowledge Thee, the supreme, the only desirable good, be to love Thee, I do love Thee. If comparatively to despise and undervalue all the world contains, which is esteemed great, or fair, or good; if earnestly and constantly to desire Thee, Thy favour, Thy acceptance, Thyself, rather than any or all things Thou hast created, be to love Thee, I do love Thee! . . .

"If to rejoice in Thy essential majesty and glory; if to feel a vital joy o'erspread and cheer the heart at each perception of Thy blessedness, at every thought that Thou art God; that all things are in Thy power; that there is none superior or equal to Thee, be to love Thee, I do love Thee!"

That is a remarkable bit of religious meditation. It might have been written by Madame Guyon. There are, indeed, many points of resemblance betwixt the mystical Frenchwoman and this practical, strong-souled Englishwoman. But if Madame Guyon had been the mother of nineteen children, and had to nourish them on the scanty income of the Epworth parsonage, it may be doubted whether her "reflections" would have had the serene altitude of the sentences we have quoted. Charles Wesley, in 1742, wrote his mother's epitaph:—

> "True daughter of affliction she,
> Inured to pain and misery;
> Mourned a long night of griefs and fears,
> A legal night of seventy years."

But that can hardly be described as a "legal night" in which shone such star-like thoughts as those we have quoted.

And yet the extract we have given shows the defects of the writer's theology. It exactly reflects the spiritual methods of her son during the troubled years before his conversion. She has the essential graces of Christian character, but without any note of glad confidence or any certainty of acceptance before God. The methods of logic take the place in her spiritual life of the gracious "witness" of the Holy Spirit. She has to assure both

God and herself that she loves by the help of syllogisms! In the language of technical theology she "confounded justification with sanctification"; and this was not a mere blunder in metaphysics. She believed, and she taught her children to believe, that the consciousness of acceptance with God came, not at the beginning of the Christian life, but at the end. It was not so much a motive to obedience as the reward of an obedience which existed independently of it.

If Mrs. Wesley had applied her theology to the story of the Prodigal Son she must have entirely rewritten that pearl of parables. She must have described the father as postponing the kiss, the ring, the best robe—all the pledges of restored sonship—until the poor, returning outcast had gone into the kitchen of his father's house, done the work of a servant, and bought himself a decent suit of clothes with his own earnings! She herself said late in life that she had always regarded the consciousness of God's forgiving grace as the rare experience of great saints, and an experience impossible to ordinary Christians.

Now what Mrs. Wesley did not know she could not teach, and this explains the missing elements in the childish piety of her great son.

Wesley's youthful religion hardly survived the rough shocks of life at the Charterhouse and at Oxford. It passed away inevitably with the tender years which gave it birth. Wesley himself says, "Outward restraints being removed, I was much more negligent than before even of outward duties, and was continually guilty of outward sins which I knew to be such, though they were not scandalous in the eye of the world." Wesley wrote these words in 1738, just after his conversion; and when, judging his past life by the test of the emotions and new-born ideals of that great experience, he naturally painted it in dark tints. "I still read the Scriptures," he says, "and said my prayers morning and evening." Then with a characteristic touch of what may be called *ex post facto* self-analysis, he adds: "What I then hoped to be saved by was (1) not being so bad as other people, (2) having still a kindness for religion, (3) reading the Bible, going to church and saying my prayers." That

was, of course, a singularly inadequate scheme of religion. And though it cannot be said that Wesley at any time plunged into vicious conduct, yet he fell into a frivolous mood. His conscience lost both alertness and authority. And by the time he had reached twenty-two—and for years before that, indeed—the purely imitative piety of his childhood had, even to his own consciousness, become a failure.

# CHAPTER II

## IN SEARCH OF A THEOLOGY

At the beginning of 1725 Wesley, with a successful University course behind him, had to choose a career. His Fellowship naturally opened the gate to one of the three learned professions, the law, medicine, or the Church. Wesley had in a supreme degree some, at least, of the gifts which make a great lawyer; and he had strong natural tastes, as after years showed, in the direction of medicine. He dabbled in physic, indeed, throughout his whole life. But on the whole the Church was for him inevitable. The forces of heredity, the whole pressure of his training, and certain qualities of natural temperament carried him in that direction. There were college livings, too, and livings in the gift of Charterhouse, that made the outlook cheerful. His father had been pressing him in this direction; and early in the year Wesley wrote to Epworth saying he was disposed to take Orders.

The choice was for him of supreme importance, since it definitely threw his life into the currents of religion. Charles Wesley, when tracing the forces which turned his mind in the same direction, says, "Diligence led me into serious thinking." The earnestness with which he bent himself to study awakened, as though with kindred but deeper vibrations, all his higher faculties. And with his brother John the decision to enter Holy Orders made him look at religion with new eyes. Later Wesley taught his Church that conversion was the essential pre-requisite for the ministerial office; but in his own case that order was inverted. He decided to take Holy Orders, and then betook himself to "serious thinking" to discover what spiritual fitness he possessed for the calling he had selected!

It is curious to read his father's discussion of the

motives proper to a candidate for the great office of the Christian ministry. He writes:—

"My thoughts are: if it is no harm to desire getting into that office, even as Eli's sons, *to eat a piece of bread*, yet certainly a desire and an intention to lead a stricter life, and a belief that one should do so, is a better reason. Though this should by all means be begun before, or ten to one it will deceive us afterwards."

This seems a curiously inadequate account of the spiritual equipment necessary for one taking up an office so great. His mother strikes a little loftier note:—

"Dear Jacky,—The alteration of your temper has occasioned me much speculation. I, who am apt to be sanguine, hope it may proceed from the operations of God's Holy Spirit, that by taking away your relish of sensual enjoyments He may prepare and dispose your mind for a more serious and close application to things of a more sublime and spiritual nature. If it be so, happy are you if you cherish those dispositions, and now in good earnest resolve to make religion the business of your life. . . . Now I mention this, it calls to mind your letter to your father about taking Orders. I was much pleased with it, and liked the proposal well. . . . I approve the disposition of your mind and think the sooner you are a deacon the better; because it may be an inducement to greater application in the study of practical divinity, which I humbly conceive is the best study for candidates for Orders."

Mrs. Wesley, after her fashion, proposes that her son should instantly proceed to interrogate himself, "that you may know whether you have a reasonable hope of salvation—that is, whether you are in a state of faith and repentance or not. If you are," she says, "the satisfaction of knowing it will abundantly reward your pains. If not, you will find a more reasonable occasion for tears than can be met with in a tragedy."

This is good advice, no doubt; but here again is the same odd inversion of the true spiritual order. The ministerial office comes first, and fitness for it afterwards! Her son is not to take Orders because he has the necessary equipment of practical divinity; he is to take Orders in order that he may study practical divinity.

Wesley, however, having decided on his career, set

himself with characteristic thoroughness to prepare for it. His own record is: "When I was about twenty-two my father pressed me to enter into Holy Orders. I began to alter the whole form of my conversation and to set in earnest to enter upon a new life."

A student, familiar with books, and accustomed to approach everything from the literary side, he betook himself to devotional literature; and three writers, widely separated from each other in time, and very diverse in genius and atmosphere — Thomas à Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law — profoundly influenced him. Great, subtle, far-reaching is the power of a good book! In a sense, as Milton taught, it is an immortal force. The hand that wrote it, the brains in which it was conceived, turn to dust; but the book lives, and sings, or instructs, or warns, ever new generations of readers. The *De Imitatione Christi* has been printed in more languages, has found more readers, and perhaps has influenced more lives, than any other book save the Bible. Who actually wrote it is still matter for dispute; but that nameless monk in his far-off cell, who into the sentences of the *Imitatio* distilled, in Dean Milman's words, "all that is elevating and passionate in all the older mystics," first stirred, across three centuries, deep religious feeling in Wesley's heart. As he read the immortal book, "I began to see," he says, "that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as words and actions. . . . I set apart an hour or two a day for religious retirement. I communicated every week; I watched against all sin, whether in word or deed. . . . So that now doing so much and living so good a life I doubted not that I was a good Christian."

Jeremy Taylor influenced Wesley almost as profoundly as did Thomas à Kempis. And yet no contrast could well be greater than that betwixt the two minds: Wesley with his logic, ice-clear and ice-cold, and his scorn of rhetoric; and Jeremy Taylor, "the golden-mouthed preacher," with his more than tropical tangle of eloquence. Jeremy Taylor has been called "the Shakespeare of theology." De Quincey tells how he once began an elaborate Life of the great divine, but never got farther than the

first sentence—"Jeremy Taylor, the most eloquent and the subtlest of Christian philosophers, was the son of a barber and the son-in-law of a king." But De Quincey, himself one of the supreme masters of style in English literature, is never tired of singing the praises of Jeremy Taylor's prose. He classes him with the author of "Urn Burial" and with Jean Paul Richter, as the richest, the most dazzling, and the most captivating of rhetoricians. And certainly the man who amid the tumult and strife of the Civil War wrote "The Rules of Holy Living and Holy Dying" had, perhaps, the most melodious voice in all Christian literature. It is still audible above the strife of parties and the clash of battle amid which Jeremy Taylor moved.

His scholarship, his spiritual glow, his gentle spirit for a time took captive Wesley's mind. And yet Jeremy Taylor must have exercised, in some respects, an evil influence on Wesley. Coleridge declares that the author of "Holy Living and Holy Dying" was "half a Socinian in heart," and it is certain that the Cross of Christ can be seen but very dimly through the golden mist of Taylor's rhetoric. He was a *protégé* of Archbishop Laud, and his High Churchmanship was so extreme that, like other and more modern Churchmanship of the same altitude, it is almost undistinguishable from Popery. Coleridge complains that "he never speaks with the slightest symptoms of affection or respect of Luther, Calvin, or any other of the great reformers, but he *saints* every trumpery monk or friar down to the very latest canonisations of the modern Popes." Jeremy Taylor did not help to clarify Wesley's theology; he served, indeed, to give it an added flavour of sacerdotalism.

But Wesley took neither himself nor his teachers on trust. He interrogated them, as he did his own spiritual condition, with tireless diligence. His common-sense, for example, rejects the ascetic element in the *De Imitatione Christi*, its quarrel with innocent gladness, its exaggeration of the spiritual value of sorrow. "I cannot think," he tells his mother, "that when God sent us into the world He had irreversibly decreed that we should be perpetually miserable in it." His father, on the whole, agreed with à Kempis. "Mortification," he said, "was

still an indispensable Christian duty." But after all, the heroic strain in the *Imitatio* was too high for the good little rector, and, with a flash of unusual wisdom, he refers John to his mother, saying, "she had leisure to bolt the matter to the bran."

Mrs. Wesley discusses with exquisite good sense the whole ethics of pleasure:—

"Would you judge of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pleasure take this rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things—in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself."

The wisest of casuists might find it difficult to better that interpretation of human duty!

Wesley, with a fine readiness, absorbed what was spiritually wholesome in his new teachers. From the *Imitatio Christi* he learned something of the altitude and range of the spiritual life. After reading it he says, "I saw that giving even all my life to God, supposing it possible to do this, would profit me nothing, unless I gave my heart; yea, all my heart to Him." Jeremy Taylor taught him the great truth, on which he dwells with such tender and moving emphasis, the need of absolute simplicity and purity of intention. "Instantly," says Wesley, "I resolved to dedicate all my life to God—all my thoughts and words and actions—being thoroughly convinced that there is no medium, but that every part of my life—not some only—must be either a sacrifice to God or myself; that is the devil."

But he questions, with invincible good sense, Jeremy Taylor's exaggeration of the duty of humility. Was it really a form of piety to believe ourselves to be worse than anybody else? "It is all," argues Wesley, "a question of fact. One, for instance, who is in company with a freethinker cannot avoid knowing himself to be the better of the two."

At this stage, however, Wesley was more concerned, on the whole, with making his theology clear, than with his own spiritual condition. He discusses a hundred vexed questions in theology with his father and mother; and it

is difficult to believe that at that time any other correspondence in England could rival, in mingled sense and seriousness, the letters which passed betwixt John Wesley in Oxford and the family circle in the Epworth Rectory. His mother was, perhaps, the best theologian in the group, though her theology was not always of the evangelical type.

John Wesley discusses the perplexed question of predestination with her. "That doctrine," she tells him, "as maintained by the rigid Calvinists, is very shocking, and ought to be abhorred; because it directly charges the most high God with being the Author of sin." "God has an election," she argues, "but it is founded on His foreknowledge, and does in no wise derogate from the glory of God's free grace, nor impair the liberty of man." Years afterwards, Wesley printed his mother's letters in the *Arminian Magazine*, and they, no doubt, helped to shape his theology, and that of the Church he founded.

Mother and son again held debate on such questions as the true nature of faith, of repentance, of the Trinity; the damnatory clauses in the Athanasian Creed; future punishment, the doctrine of assurance, &c. &c. On the subject of assurance Wesley, at this stage, held sounder views than his mother. "An absolute certainty that God has forgiven us," she says, "you can never have until you come to heaven." Wesley replies: "I am persuaded that we may know that we are now in a state of salvation, since that is expressly promised in the Holy Scriptures to our sincere endeavours." But here he falters, and misses —as for the next thirteen years he missed—the great truth of the direct attestation the Holy Spirit bears in the believing soul of the forgiveness of sins. "We are surely," says John Wesley, "able to judge of our own sincerity"; and the estimate the human soul is able to form of its own "sincerity" is, apparently, the sole foundation on which could be built the rejoicing certainty that sin is forgiven!

Wesley was ordained deacon on September 19, 1725; he preached his first sermon at South Leigh, a small village near Witney. Later, he spent the summer of 1726 at Epworth, preaching for his father and pursuing his own studies.

For his parents this must have been a delightful visit. John Wesley had upon him the fresh glories of his fellowship; life for him was opening very brilliantly; he was of blameless character, and stood on the threshold of the most sacred office a human being can hold. His father had written to him a few months before, when a new note of gravity had stolen into his son's letters: "If you be but what you write, you and I shall be happy." And now the father could judge that his son *was* "what he wrote."

By the fireside of the rectory, every evening, Wesley sat with his father and mother and held high debate on great themes. He notes in his diary the range of topics over which the talk wandered: how to increase our faith, our hope, our love of God: prudence, sincerity, simplicity, &c. To a mother of Susannah Wesley's grave and lofty bent, those fireside talks with her brilliant and accomplished son, who came to her from the atmosphere of a University, and was plainly on the entrance of a great career, must have been an exquisite pleasure.

But was Wesley, at this time, and in the clear Scriptural sense of the word, a Christian? He shall answer for himself. In 1744 he drew up a statement of the great evangelical truths which had changed his life, and by the preaching of which he was affecting the lives of multitudes. Then he looks back on the time we have just been describing:—

"'It was many years,' he says, 'after I was ordained deacon before I was convinced of the great truths above recited; during all that time I was utterly ignorant of the nature and condition of justification. Sometimes I confounded it with sanctification, particularly when I was in Georgia. At other times I had some confused notion about the forgiveness of sins; but then I took it for granted the time of this must be either the hour of death or the day of judgment. I was equally ignorant of the nature of saving faith, apprehending it to mean no more than a firm assent to all the propositions contained in the Old and New Testaments.'"

This was surely a very remarkable degree of theological ignorance to be found in a mind so clear, and one that had enjoyed such a training! But the theology of Epworth Parsonage, with all its seriousness and charm, was very defective. And while men are to be judged,

not by their theology, but by their life, yet any grave misreading of divine truth must profoundly affect the life.

As for Wesley, an unrelenting thoroughness marked at every stage his temper in religion. He would have no uncertainties, no easy and soft illusions. Religion as a divine gift, and as a human experience, was something definite. He possessed it, or he did not possess it. No intermediate stage was thinkable. And with a wise — but almost unconscious — instinct he put his theology to the one final test. He cast it into the alembic of experience. He tried it by the challenge of life; of its power to colour and shape life. He spent the next thirteen years in that process; trying his creed with infinite courage, with transparent sincerity, and often with toil and suffering, by the rough acid of life, till at last he reached that conception of Christ and His Gospel which lifted his spirit up to such dazzling heights of gladness and power.

William Law, no doubt, influenced Wesley at this stage more profoundly than even Thomas à Kempis or Jeremy Taylor. Law's "Serious Call" is one of the great books of Christian literature. Dr. Johnson told Boswell that he had been a lax talker against religion till he read Law's work. "I took up the book," he said, "expecting to find it a dull book, as such books generally are; but I found Law quite an overmatch for me. That book first set me thinking in earnest." Wesley, late in life, and after he had renounced Law himself as a religious guide, yet declared the "Serious Call" to be "unsurpassed in the English language for beauty of expression and for justness and depth of thought."

Law lives vaguely in the popular memory as a mystic; and it is true that, as Southey puts it, "the man who had shaken so many intellects sacrificed his own at last to the reveries and rhapsodies of Jacob Behmen." But if William Law ended in mysticism, his earlier years were unclouded by that evil fog.

There was no hint of the mystic in Law's appearance— a stout, round-faced man, with ruddy, farmer-like cheeks, heavy of foot and solid of body. There is nothing, too, of mystic nebulousness in his earlier works. It would

be difficult to match Law for strong-fibred logic, for quick and piercing vision into the flaws of an adversary's argument. His books are, for the modern taste, robbed of charm by the writer's habit of personifying all his vices and virtues, and labelling them with Latinised names—"Paternus," "Modestus," &c. And yet few writers have such a command of resonant, expressive English as William Law. His terse sentences have in them, not seldom, a salt of satire not unworthy of Swift.

Law for some time was spiritual director of the household of the father of Gibbon, the famous historian, and was tutor to young Gibbon himself. There is an element of humour in that association—the combination of the mystic, who looked at the whole material world as a parable of the spiritual universe, and the arid sceptic, who treated the spiritual world as irrelevant, or even non-existent. Yet Law's visible devoutness and sincerity won even Gibbon's admiration. "If he finds a spark of piety in any mind," he said, "Law will soon kindle it to a flame."

The effect this great and powerful writer produced on Wesley he himself has described:—

"Meeting now with Mr. Law's 'Christian Perfection' and 'Serious Call,' although I was much offended with many parts of both, yet they convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height and depth and breadth of the law of God. The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul that everything appeared in a new view. I cried to God for help; resolved as I had never done before, not to prolong the time of obeying Him. And, by my continued endeavour to keep His whole law inward and outward to the utmost of my power, I was persuaded that I should be accepted of Him, and that I was even then in a state of salvation."

# CHAPTER III

## A DEEPER NOTE

It is possible, at this stage, to assess roughly the influence that these three great books had on Wesley. They aroused his conscience. They gave him a transfiguring vision of the awful sweep and altitude of religion; how great were God's claims, how vast was man's duty. But if they awoke in him great aspirations they did not teach him the divine art of realising them. Their emphasis rested not on God's grace, but on man's duty. If, then, they awakened the conscience, they left it helpless. The great triumphant secret of Christianity: forgiveness—of grace, and through faith—and obedience, under the forces that stream into the soul through forgiveness, they left unrevealed. They missed, in a word, the order, eternal and changeless, which God has fixed for the spiritual life. In that order, forgiveness comes first. It is the Beautiful Gate into the temple of a godly life. Or, to vary the metaphor, it is the channel through which stream into the forgiven soul all those great forces of love and gratitude which make obedience not merely possible, but inevitable and exultant.

It is quite true that in each of these great books stray phrases are found which are as evangelical as anything in Charles Wesley's most triumphant hymns, or in George Whitefield's most passionate appeals. Law, for example, told Wesley, "You would have a philosophical religion; but there can be no such thing. Religion is the most simple thing in the world. It is only 'We love Him because He first loved us.'" What words could go more directly to the heart of Christianity! St. John might have written them; St. Paul would have countersigned them.

But all the effective emphasis of Law's writings lies elsewhere. And the strength of the three great books,

which so powerfully influenced Wesley at this stage of his spiritual development, lies in the affirmation, we repeat, not so much of divine grace, as of human obligation. They clothed the great ethics of Christianity with more imperious authority to Wesley's conscience; but they failed to teach the special message of Christianity, the relation of the personal soul to the personal Saviour. So they left him bankrupt of that spiritual energy, flowing direct from the Holy Spirit, which alone brings the lofty ethics of the New Testament within the realm of human possibility.

Wesley returned to Oxford in September 1726, and took his degree of Master of Arts in 1727. In August of the same year he became his father's curate at Epworth and Wroot, until on November 22, 1729, he was recalled to Oxford. Wesley thus had more than two years of actual parish work as his father's curate. He possessed what would be almost universally regarded as pre-eminent endowments for success in that work. He was a scholar, a gentleman, with a trained brain, a tireless body, a matchless faculty for crystalline speech, an intense zeal, and a conception of religious duty almost austere in its thoroughness. He had, that is to say, all the human qualifications for success as a minister in at least as high a degree as at any stage of his whole life. And yet he failed, failed utterly and consciously—failed exactly as he afterwards failed at Georgia! He had not learned the first letter in the alphabet of success. He drew no crowds. He alarmed no consciences. He influenced no lives. His own summary of his work at that time is: "I preached much, but saw no fruit of my labour. Indeed, it could not be that I should, for I neither laid the foundation of repentance nor of believing the Gospel, taking it for granted that all to whom I preached were believers, and that many of them needed no repentance."

Wesley's complete failure at this stage of his life is as significant as his amazing success at a later stage. During this period the serious, not to say the ascetic, note in his experience grew more dominant. When he came into residence at Lincoln College he writes: "Entering now upon a new world, I resolved to have no acquaintance by chance, but by choice, and to choose such only as I

have reason to believe would help me on my way to heaven." "I should prefer," he writes again, "at least for some time, such a retirement as would seclude me from all the world to the station I am now in." The impulse which makes the monk was stirring in Wesley's chilled blood!

The mastership of a school in Yorkshire, proposed to him at this time, had the advantage of a good salary, but it had what in Wesley's mood at that moment was the much greater charm of almost utter inaccessibility. He had, as a general rule, a singularly healthy imagination; but just now it was diseased, and what Wesley calls the "frightful description" given of the landscape about the school, and the difficulty of anybody getting to it, fascinated him. The school was given to some one else, and his mother, with characteristic good sense, writes to congratulate him upon having missed it. "That way of life," she says, "would not have agreed with your constitution, and I hope God has better things for you to do."

In November 1729 Wesley was recalled to Oxford. An alarmed attempt was being made to restore the discipline of the University. As one detail, it was decided that the junior Fellows, who were chosen as Moderators, should in person attend to the duties of their office. In the Oxford of that day, the public disputations were amongst the most important functions of the University. At Lincoln College these were held daily, and the business of the Moderator was to preside at them. Wesley was recalled for that purpose, and threw himself, with characteristic energy, into the business. He found it an intellectual discipline of no mean value to himself. It increased his readiness of speech, his expertness in debate, his quickness of vision for the flaws in an argument. It helped to give him that formidable quality as a controversialist which served him so well in later and more stormy years.

Wesley remained in Oxford from November 22, 1729, till he left for Georgia, on October 6, 1735. These six years were, for Wesley himself, years of striving without attaining; of great aspirations, and of great spiritual defeats. He was living, as some one has said, in the

seventh chapter of Romans and had not yet reached the eighth! And in those six fateful years—years in which Wesley was practising the self-denial of an ascetic, and burning with the zeal of a fanatic—and all on a High Church theology — Methodism was born! For Methodism, it must never be forgotten, shares and reflects all the spiritual stages of its founder. It began in the stage of his unilluminated and High Church theology, of his attempts to find salvation by works, to act on Christian ethics without the energy of Christian forces, to produce the fruits of Christian living while the root was non-existent.

When Wesley returned to Oxford he conceived of religion as a tireless industry in pious acts, an intense zeal in the discharge of external duties, a form of piety to be nourished by an incessant use of all external means of grace. And he found already in existence a tiny society which exactly reflected this conception of religion, and supplied the machinery for its exercise.

Charles Wesley, who was then a student at Christ Church, had resisted his elder brother's first attempt to put on him the stamp of his own gloomy and mechanical piety. "What!" he said, "would you have me to be a saint all at once?" While John Wesley, however, was toiling in his barren curacy at Wroot, Charles flung himself with new and serious diligence into his studies, and "diligence," he records, "led me to serious thinking." As one result of this new and graver mood he began attending the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper every week. And in the ethics of that day the whole temperature of religion turned round the question of how often the Lord's Supper was taken. To take it once a week constituted piety—or oddity—according to the point of view of the critic.

There was always a singular charm in Charles Wesley's personality. His more masterful brother dominated men; Charles Wesley drew them as the magnet draws steel. A little group of fellow-students gathered round him. They crystallised into a sort of club, they undertook to live by rule, and to meet frequently for the purpose of helping each other. This little group of ordered lives quickly arrested public attention. They took all duties seriously.

Law of God, rule of the Church, statute of the University —all must be kept, and kept with exact precision. These were startling novelties! The lively wit of the University soon found a label for this cluster of oddities. They were the "Godly Club," "Biblemoths," "Sacramentarians." But the ordered fashion of their lives finally determined their title. They were Methodists! So the great historic term emerges, though the youthful wit who invented—or rediscovered—it little dreamed that he had shaped a name for a great Church about to be born.

That original band of Methodists was a constellation of goodly names: Robert Kirkham, William Morgan, James Harvey, the author of the once famous and now happily forgotten "Meditations amongst the Tombs"; George Whitefield, the greatest preacher the English pulpit has ever known; Charles Kinchin, of saintly life. Of the little group three were tutors in the colleges, the rest were bachelors of arts or undergraduates.

Wesley, on his return to Oxford, found this Society in existence, and already beginning to attract respect from some and ridicule from many. He at once joined it, and became its leading spirit. His standing in the University, his energy of will, his quickness of speech, and his natural genius for influencing others at once made him the master spirit of the little club. "I hear," wrote his father, "my son John has the honour of being styled the 'Father of the Holy Club.' If it be so, I am sure I must be the grandfather of it."

John Wesley stamped an even deeper seriousness on the life of the little club. He gave a new austerity to its discipline, a sharper strain to its order, a new daring to its zeal. The little company met every night to review what had been done, and to lay plans for the next day. The sick were visited, help was given to the poor, children were taught in the schools, visits were paid to the inmates of the workhouse and of the prison.

This tiny group of serious lives grew to fifteen in number. Its members fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays. They subjected themselves to elaborate self-scrutiny. They multiplied, and drew yet more tense, the rules which regulated the employment of every hour and the use of every faculty. Mrs. Wesley's advice to her son helped to

determine the physiognomy of the little society. "Appoint," she wrote, "so much time to sleep, eating, company, &c. . . . Often put yourselves the question, 'Why do I do this or that?' by which means you will come to such a steadiness and consistency as becomes a reasonable creature and a good Christian."

The new club naturally kindled much ridicule: it soon provoked an opposition which grew violent. Here is a curious story told in Benson's "Wesley":—

"A gentleman, eminent for learning and well esteemed for piety, told his nephew, who had joined the little company, that if he dared to go to the weekly Communion any longer he would turn him out of doors. This argument had no success; the young gentleman communicated next week. The uncle now became more violent, and shook his nephew by the throat to convince him more effectually that receiving the Sacrament every week was founded in error; but this argument appearing to the young gentleman to have no weight in it he continued his weekly practice. This eminent person, so well esteemed for piety, now changed his mode of attack. . . . By a soft obliging manner he melted down the young gentleman's resolution of being so strictly religious, and from this time he began to absent himself five Sundays out of six from the Sacrament. . . . One of the seniors of the college consulting with the doctor, they prevailed with the other young gentlemen to promise they would only communicate three times a year."

What must have been the religious climate of the great University when its heads set themselves in this fashion, and by such methods, to discourage piety amongst the undergraduates?

Wesley met the attacks on the little Society by drawing up, in the Socratic style, a series of questions, of which these are examples:—

"Whether we shall not be more happy hereafter the more good we do now?

"Whether we may not try to do good among the young gentlemen of the University; particularly whether we may not endeavour to convince them of the necessity of being Christians, and of being scholars?

"Whether we may not try to convince them of the necessity of method and industry, in order to either learning or virtue?

"Whether we may not try to confirm and increase their industry by communicating as often as they can?

"May we not try to do good to those who are hungry, naked, or sick? If we know any necessitous family, may we not give them a little money, clothes, or physic, as they want?

"If they can read, may we not give them a Bible, a Common Prayer-book? . . . May we not inquire now and then how they have used them, explain what they do not understand, and enforce what they do?

"May we not contribute what we are able towards having their children clothed and taught to read?

"May we not try to do good towards those who are in prison? . . . May we not lend small sums to those who are of any trade that they procure themselves tools and materials to work with? . . ."

There is, of course, a strain of Socratic irony in these interrogations. No one could quarrel with the practices thus described without making open war on religion itself; and Wesley's schedule of inconvenient and unanswerable queries undoubtedly, for the moment, silenced the scoffers. But if the diligence of the Methodists in practical beneficence increased, so the ascetic—not to say monkish—strain of their personal religion grew more intense. John Wesley drew up at this time, for himself and his companions, a scheme of self-examination which Southey declares, with some truth, might well be appended to the spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola. Here are samples:

"Have I been simple and recollected in everything I did?" And under this head is a swarm of microscopic tests of "sincerity," which the soul was to apply to itself. "Have I prayed with fervour?" Then follows a list of the times in each day at which prayer must be offered, and a series of tests for ascertaining the exact degree of fervour in each prayer—tests which irresistibly suggest a spiritual thermometer, with a graduated scale to register the rise of the mercury. Wesley adopted the practice his mother urged of asking, "Have I, in private prayer, frequently stopped short and observed what fervour in devotion?" That is, the anxious soul was to keep one eye directed to the Object of prayer, and the other vigilantly fixed upon itself, so as to observe its own behaviour. The ideal of each member of the Holy Club at this stage was,

plainly, to keep his own soul under a microscope, and watch its motions with tireless suspicion.

The practical tests by which each member was to try himself were of a saner kind; but the note is pitched very high:—

"1. Have I embraced every probable opportunity of doing good, and of preventing, removing, or lessening evil? 2. Have I thought anything too dear to part with, to serve my neighbour? 3. Have I spent an hour at least every day in speaking to some one or other? 4. Have I in speaking to a stranger explained what religion is not (not negative, not external), and what it is, the recovery of the image of God; searched at what step in it he stops, and what makes him stop? 5. Have I persuaded all I could to attend public prayers, sermons, and sacraments, and in general to obey the laws of the Church Universal, the Church of England, the State, the University, and their respective colleges? 6. Have I, after every visit, asked him who went with me, did I say anything wrong? 7. Have I, when any one asked advice, directed and exhorted him with all my power? 8. Have I rejoiced with and for my neighbour in virtue or pleasure; grieved with him in pain, and for him in sin? 9. Has goodwill been, and appeared to be, the spring of all my actions towards others."

It is impossible to deny that there is a lofty and Christ-like note in the type of life here aimed at, though the questions represent aims rather than attainments. And these fine virtues—charity, meekness, devotion, diligence—did they spring from no root? They were the genuine fruits of religion; but they sprang from the root of a theology maimed and incomplete. They left the soul without any assurance of acceptance, and the conscience without any atmosphere of peace.

As for Wesley himself, he toiled in the routine of good works with a diligence which can only be described as passionate, and with severities of self-denial almost worthy of an Indian fakir. He already had formed the habit of rising at four o'clock every morning, a practice which he kept up almost to the day of his death. He found when he had £30 a year he could live on £28, and he gave away the odd £2; and when he enjoyed his comfortable fellowship, he still lived on £28, and gave to the poor the remainder of his income. He fasted with an heroic diligence and severity, which at last broke down

his health. He imposed on himself a taciturnity of iron quality. His brother Charles records, incidentally, "I cannot excuse my brother mentioning nothing of Epworth when he has just come from it. Taciturnity as to family affairs is his infirmity. . . . It was much that he told me they were all well there, for he did not use to be so communicative."

What a contrast this is to the radiant Wesley of after years, with his frank tongue and shining face; the Wesley of whom Dr. Johnson—to whom conversation was a luxury—said, "I could talk with him all day and all night, too"; the Wesley in whom Alexander Knox, who knew him as few men did, found "an habitual gaiety of heart" expressed continuously in both face and speech, and whom he describes as "the most perfect specimen of moral happiness which I ever saw." In Wesley's speech, look, and temper he discovered "more to teach me what a heaven upon earth is . . . than all I have elsewhere seen or heard or read, except in the Sacred Volume." The difference betwixt the two Wesleys—Wesley the ascetic and Wesley the evangelist—is that betwixt a landscape on which the night is lying, and one on which the sun is risen. Knox describes Wesley as he was after he had found the great secret of the Christian life. At this stage he was only seeking it, and seeking it in the wrong direction.

Wesley's earnestness at this time trembled on the edge of mere over-strained fanaticism. "I am tempted," he writes, "to break off my pursuit of all learning but what immediately tends to practice." He seriously contemplated the formation of a society for the yet more strict observance of saints' days, of Saturday as a Christian festival, of all the fast-days of the ancient Church, &c. It became for him a matter of conscience that the wine used in the Sacrament should be mixed with water; for, says Wesley, "we were in the strongest sense High Churchmen." "No man," he says in a letter to his father, "is in a state of salvation until he is contemned by the whole world"; and Wesley, at this stage, was diligently qualifying himself for that contempt, and finding a morbid enjoyment in the process!

There is a strain of mysticism clearly visible, too, in

Wesley's religious mood at this stage, and it seems in irreconcilable conflict with the rigid and mechanical ritualism of his outward life. Mystic and ritualist: that is the strangest combination! They represent the union in one life of discordant elements. Mysticism and ritualism are not half-truths; they are contradictories. One lays supreme emphasis on external acts; the other denies the external world, and dwells in a land of dreams.

Wesley gets rid of his mysticism first; startled, as a nature so practical as his must have been, by its fundamental quarrel with practical religion. He writes to his brother Samuel an amazingly keen analysis of the essential characteristics of mysticism:—

"I think the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith was the writings of the mystics; under which term I comprehend all, and only those, who slight any of the means of grace. I have drawn up a short scheme of their doctrines and beg your thoughts upon it. . . .

"Men utterly divested of free-will, of self-love and self-activity are entered into the passive state, and enjoy such a contemplation as is not only above faith, but above sight—such as is entirely free from images, thoughts, and discourse, and never interrupted by sins of infirmity or voluntary distractions. They have absolutely renounced their reason and understanding, else they could not be guided by a divine light. They seek no clear or particular knowledge of anything, but only an obscure, general knowledge, which is far better.

"Having thus attained the end, the means must cease. Hope is swallowed up in love. Sight, or something more than sight, takes the place of faith. All particular virtues they possess in the essence, and therefore need not the direct exercise of them.

"Sensible devotion in any prayer they despise; it being a great hindrance to perfection. The Scripture they need not read, for it is only His letter, with whom they converse face to face. Neither do they need the Lord's Supper, for they never cease to *remember* Christ in the most acceptable manner."

This is a reading of religion which comes perilously near its very denial! Wesley quarrelled with mysticism on another ground. He was too keen a logician not to see that in the last analysis it is but the subtlest form of self-righteousness; and every form of self-righteousness is fundamentally a rejection of Christ and His redemption.

"If righteousness is by the law"—or by any form of human effort—then, in Paul's tremendous phrase, "then is Christ dead in vain." His Cross is not merely an irrelevance, it is an impertinence. And nothing can be finer than the keen and penetrating logic with which Wesley tracks back mysticism to its ultimate root as a form of self-righteousness.

In writing to his brother from Georgia he had criticised Law's mystical teaching. Law had taught him that outward works were nothing being alone; and, he adds, "he recommended to supply what was wanting in them, mental prayer and like exercises, as the most effectual means of purifying the soul and uniting it with God."

Now, "these were in truth," says Wesley, with a glance of characteristically keen vision, "as much my own works as visiting the sick or clothing the naked; and the union with God thus pursued was really my own righteousness as any I had before pursued under another name." "All the other enemies of Christianity," he writes elsewhere, "are trifles. The mystics are the most dangerous. They stab it in the vitals, and its most serious professors are most likely to fall by them."

# CHAPTER IV

## A RELIGION THAT FAILED

THE strain of such a religion as that on which Wesley was now trying to live was too much for human nature. Even Wesley's tough body, with its nerves of wire and tissues of iron, broke down. His body might have survived the fasts he imposed upon it, the strain of work, the grudged allowance of sleep. But when to this was added a mind disquieted, a religious consciousness vexed and pricked with incessant doubts, it was no wonder that his health failed. It seemed, indeed, as if the ill-usage of his own body was at that time part of Wesley's religion. In a humorous letter in verse which, on April 20, 1732, Samuel Wesley wrote to his brother Charles, he asks :—

> "Does John seem bent beyond his strength to go;
> To his frail carcass literally foe:
> Lavish of health, as if in haste to die,
> And shorten time t' ensure eternity?"

His mother, with a touch of over-anxious motherly care, believed John was falling into consumption. He had serious hæmorrhage of the lungs, and was for some time under medical treatment.

Another member of the little group, William Morgan, died at this time, and his death brought the Holy Club under the suspicion of having killed him by its austerities. His father had written to Morgan a fortnight before his death complaining :—

"It gives me sensible trouble to hear that you are going into villages about Holt, calling their children together and teaching them their prayers and catechism and giving them a shilling at your departure. I could not but advise with a wise, pious, and learned clergyman. He told me that he has known the worst of consequences follow from such blind zeal, and plainly satisfied me

that it was a thorough mistake of true piety and religion. . . . He concluded that you were young, and, as yet, your judgment had not come to maturity. In time you would see the error of your way and think as he does, that you may walk uprightly and safely without endeavouring to outdo all the good bishops, clergy, and other pious and good men of the present and past ages."

In the curious ethics of that age a "wise, pious, and learned clergyman" plainly thought that a young man guilty of teaching little children how to pray was sinning against all religion! When Morgan died Wesley was openly accused of being contributory to his death. This brought from him a long and noble letter, addressed to Morgan's father, dated October 18, 1732, giving an account of the Holy Club and its methods. The letter—which forms the opening passage of the famous Journal—is both a history of the little society up to that date, and a defence, and is marked by qualities which make it one of the memorable documents of Christian literature.

The missing qualities in Wesley's religious state at this time are sufficiently obvious. It utterly lacked the element of joy. Religion is meant to have for the spiritual landscape the office of sunshine, but in Wesley's spiritual sky burned no divine light, whether of certainty or of hope. He imagined he could distil the rich wine of spiritual gladness out of mechanical religious exercises; but he found himself, to his own distress, and in his own words, "dull, flat, and unaffected in the use of the most solemn ordinances." Fear, too, like a shadow, haunted his mind: fear that he was not accepted before God; fear that he might lose what grace he had; fear both of life and of death. He dare not grant himself, he declared, the liberty that others enjoyed. His brother Samuel, whose letters are always rich in the salt of common-sense, had remonstrated with his younger brother for the austerities he practised and the rigours of alarmed self-interrogation under which he lived. John Wesley defends himself by the plea—in which there is an unconscious pathos—that he lacks his brother's strength and dare take no risks.

"Mirth, I grant (he says), is very fit for you. But does it follow that it is fit for me? If you are to rejoice evermore because you have put your enemies to flight, am I to do the same

while they continually assault me? You are very glad because you have passed from death to life. Well! but let *him* be afraid who knows not whether he is to live or die. Whether this be my condition or no, who can tell better than myself?"

In a letter to his mother Wesley recites all the spiritual advantages and opportunities he enjoys, and asks, "What shall I do to make all these blessings effectual? Shall I quite break off my pursuit of all learning but what immediately tends to practice? I once desired to make a fair show in languages and Philosophy; but it is past." What, he cries, is "the surest and shortest way" to the peace for which he sighed? "Is it not to be humble? But the question recurs: How am I to do this? To own the necessity of it is not to be humble."

Then this brilliant, masterful, all-accomplished Fellow of Lincoln, his body worn with fasting, his spirit weary with unsatisfied longing, turns to his mother with the gesture of a tired child. In the old, simple, far-off days at the rectory his mother was accustomed to give an hour every Thursday for religious talk with "Jacky." Wesley writes:—

"In many things you have interceded for me and prevailed. Who knows but in this, too, you may be successful? If you can spare me only that little part of Thursday evening which you formerly bestowed upon me in another manner, I doubt not but it will be as useful now for correcting my heart as it was then for forming my judgment. When I observe how fast life flies away and how slow improvement comes, I think one can never be too much afraid of dying before one has learned to live."

Canon Overton, who energetically tries to button John Wesley up, through all the stages of his life, in a High Church cassock, contends that at this stage Wesley was a saint without knowing it. It is true that Wesley himself, who ought to know best about his own spiritual condition, declared afterwards that he was utterly ignorant of true religion at this time; but Canon Overton insists heroically on defending John Wesley against John Wesley. He tells the tale of Wesley's diligence in all the ordinances of the Church, his zeal in acts of Christian beneficence, his lofty aspirations after Christian grace, and asks if that

is not to be a good Christian, what is? "If John Wesley," he says, "was not a true Christian [when in Georgia] God help millions of those who profess and call themselves Christians."

But can any one study the religious experiences of Wesley at this time and pretend that they represent the spiritual mood religion is intended to create, and *does* create, in the believing heart? Wesley at this stage was living on what can only be described as the servile theory of religion. He had not yet learned the meaning of that great saying, "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son!"

At times, however, Wesley makes it clear that, intellectually, he held all the evangelical doctrines. On January 1, 1733, for example, he preached in St. Mary's, Oxford, a remarkable sermon on "The Circumcision of the Heart." As a statement of the offices of the Holy Spirit in the human soul that sermon is unsurpassed for force and clearness. It still forms, indeed, one of the fifty-three sermons which, with Wesley's Notes on the New Testament, constitute the theological standard of the Methodist Church everywhere. Here is Wesley's definition of the spiritual state he is describing:—

> "The circumcision of the heart is that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness, and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, from all filthiness both of the flesh and the spirit; and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus; the being so renewed in the image of our mind as to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect."

It would be difficult, in the same number of words, to state more strongly that doctrine of "perfection" which is the characteristic—and in the eyes of many the scandal—of Wesley's later ministry. Wesley himself, indeed, says, in 1765, "This sermon contained all that I now teach concerning salvation from all sin and loving God with an undivided heart." And yet the sermon belongs to the period of his unilluminated theology; the time when Wesley himself was afflicted with perpetual doubts as to his own spiritual condition!

In the sermon of 1733 he goes on to define the faith

which is the secret of Christian victory. It is, he says, "An unshaken assent to all that God hath revealed in Scripture; and in particular to those important truths, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; He bore our sins in His own body on the tree; He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." And there Wesley stopped. But in 1765, when he republished the sermon, he added, with a significant "Nota bene" as a footnote, the following passage:—

"It is likewise the revelation of Christ in our hearts; a divine evidence or conviction of His love; His free, unmerited love of *me*, a sinner; a sure confidence in His pardoning mercy wrought in us by the Holy Ghost; a confidence whereby every true believer is enabled to bear witness 'I know that my Redeemer liveth'; that I have an advocate with the Father, and that Jesus Christ the righteous is *my* Lord, and the propitiation for *my* sins. I know that He hath loved *me*, and given Himself for *me;* He hath reconciled *me*, even *me* to God, and I have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

Wesley by this time has got his pronouns right! These words vibrate with the essential note of Christianity; the personal accent, the triumphant cadence! Here the central and divinest purpose in Christ's redemption has become a realised human experience. Faith is not merely an intellectual assent to certain theological or historical propositions; it is the rejoicing trust of the personal soul in a personal Saviour. But this is exactly the missing note in the sermon of 1733, as it was in Wesley's own experience at that date. And it is most instructive to see that little mosaic, on which is inscribed Wesley's joyful experience in 1765—an experience which had by that time endured for more than a quarter of a century—set as a witness amid the arid sentences of the sermon of 1733.

Another illustration of the curious theological oscillations of Wesley at this period — the fashion in which, while he grasped evangelical truth with his intellect, he utterly failed to realise it in his experience—is found in the contrast betwixt the first little book he ever printed, a book of prayers in 1733, and his second original publication some eighteen months afterwards, the sermon on

"The Trouble and Rest of Good Men." The prayers glow with evangelical fervour. For vision, simplicity, directness, and beauty they are unmatched. But in the sermon of 1735 Wesley is the High Churchman again. He has swung back into the realm of sacerdotal theology! Perfect holiness, he declares, "is not found on earth. Some remains of our disease will ever be felt. Who," he asks, "will deliver us from the body of this death?" His curiously unevangelical answer is "Death will deliver us! Death shall destroy at once the whole body of sin."

Death, in brief, is the Christ of the soul, and is the only deliverer the soul will ever know! Wesley, it is plain, had at this time no clear, sustained vision of Christian truth, verified in his own experience. He swings like a pendulum betwixt contradictory conceptions.

An odd illustration of Wesley's changing moods is found in the somewhat absurd correspondence he carried on at this time with a woman who in after years attained social and literary fame—Mary Granville, afterwards Mrs. Pendarvis. She was three years older than Wesley, a young and fascinating widow, the niece of Lord Lansdowne, rich, witty, beautiful. Wesley met her at the house of the Kirkhams, and the youthful Fellow of Lincoln College and the brilliant and fashionable young widow corresponded with each other. Wesley labelled himself "Cyrus," Mary Granville was disguised as "Aspasia"; and for many months Cyrus and Aspasia exchanged letters through which there runs a curious mixture of theology, and of a personal feeling that trembled on the verge of mere flirtation. Cyrus cries, "Tell me, Aspasia, if it be a fault that my heart burns within me when I reflect on the many marks of regard you have already shown me." Then he exhorts Aspasia to "pray for him," and discusses with her some problem in theology. "Oh, Cyrus!" writes Aspasia, "how noble a defence you make! And how you are adorned with the beauty of holiness." Later, Aspasia complains that "Cyrus by this time had blotted me out of his memory."

There is the oddest mixture of doctrinal discussion and of very human sentiment in this correspondence, and Cyrus plainly was in imminent danger of forgetting the theologian in the lover. Sometimes, indeed, he crossed

the line; and the lady herself—though too late, and only when Wesley had moved into quite another realm of feeling—was visibly more than willing to infuse a very human warmth into her letters.

It sheds some curious light on Wesley's mood where the fair sex is concerned to notice that the correspondence with Aspasia blossomed on the stock of an earlier correspondence—that with Miss Betty Kirkham—a correspondence in which beat the pulse of a very definite and human love. Betty Kirkham was the sister of his college friend, and that Wesley loved her in his temperate fashion, and would have married her, can hardly be doubted. Some unkind force—perhaps parental authority on the one side or the other—interfered. Betty Kirkham married some one else, and died after a very brief wedded life. It was in the house of the Kirkhams that Wesley met Mrs. Pendarvis. Wesley, in his correspondence with Betty Kirkham, labelled her Varanese, and his earlier letters to Aspasia are full of references to "my V., my dear V." Wesley, however, kept a vigilant and scientific eye on his own emotions as a lover; and he tells Aspasia, "I cannot but often observe with pleasure the great resemblance between the emotions I feel in writing to Aspasia and that with which my heart frequently overflowed in the beginning of my intercourse with our dear V."

This is another proof that Wesley was destitute of any quick sense of humour. How could he expect one young lady to be interested in the circumstance that the business of writing to her excited in her correspondent exactly the same emotions which the process of writing to an earlier and lost love once awakened! All through his life Wesley never comes so near the point of being absurd as when he is in love, or is in the earlier stages of love. Perhaps, indeed, he never felt love in the usual human sense. But he was nurtured in a household singularly rich in feminine influences. He knew, as few men could have known, how keen a woman's intelligence may be, how quick her wit, how tender her affections, how clear her spiritual insight. And all through his life he eagerly sought the friendship of clever and pure women.

# CHAPTER V

## OXFORD LOSES ITS SPELL

AN expressive proof of the cloistered and self-centred character of Wesley's piety at this stage may be found in his refusal to take his father's place at Epworth. His father was now old, and was visibly breaking down in health. He might die at any moment. Who should be his successor? On that point hung practically the future of the Epworth household. The living was of value; the rector had spent a considerable part of his income in improving the parsonage. If John could secure the next presentation this would ensure a home for his mother and sisters as long as they needed it. The living was in the gift of the Crown, and John Wesley was strongly urged to take steps at once to secure the appointment.

He hesitated, doubted, debated, and at last definitely refused; and he justifies himself in a letter of stupendous length to his father, a letter which in bulk would almost make a pamphlet. A decision which required an apology on such a scale must have been doubtful!

Wesley's reasons for refusing, when analysed, are all of a personal, not to say selfish, sort. His first consideration he declares is "which way of life will conduce most to my own improvement?" He needs daily converse with his friends, and he knows "no other place under heaven, save Oxford, where I can have always at hand half-a-dozen persons of my own judgment and engaged in the same studies. . . . To have such a number of such friends constantly watching over my soul" is a blessing which, in a word, Wesley cannot bring himself to give up. At Oxford, too, he enjoys retirement. "I have not only as much, but as little, company as I please." He is free from care; he enjoys all sorts of spiritual opportunities—public prayer twice a day, the weekly sacrament of the Lord's Supper, &c. Whatever others may do, says

Wesley, "I could not stand my ground, no, not for one month, against intemperance in sleeping, eating and drinking, against irregularity in study, against softness and self-indulgence, unless"——in brief, he had such aids to Christian living as Oxford alone afforded. "Half Christians," he declares, would kill him. "They undermine insensibly all my resolutions and quite steal from me the little fervour I have. I never come from among these 'saints of the world' but faint, dissipated, and shorn of all my strength." Except he can crouch beneath the shelter of a stronger faith than his own, John Wesley protests he must die; so he will not venture from Oxford!

The question of doing good to others has, of course, to be considered; but Wesley tells his father bluntly "the question is not whether I could do more good to others there or here, but whether I could do more to myself. Seeing wherever I can be most holy myself, there I can most promote holiness in others." But this is at Oxford, and only at Oxford. It has been urged that at Oxford many persons "despised him," and he would at least, by going to Epworth, step into an atmosphere of respect. But Wesley is in that unhealthy spiritual mood in which persecution is a sort of luxury. A Christian, he replies, will be despised anywhere; "nay, until he be thus contemned no man is in a state of salvation."

All this shows that Wesley's piety was of the cloistered type. It dreads the fresh air. Unless wrapped in cotton wool, and fed with a spoon, and allowed to breathe a medicated atmosphere, it will die!

His father was too sick to wrestle with a filial logician at once so ingenious and so diffuse. He tells his son Samuel he "had done what he could with such a shattered head and body, to satisfy the scruples which your brother has raised against my proposal from conscience and duty," and he appeals to Samuel to help him.

Samuel now takes up the correspondence, and asks his brother, with refreshing bluntness, if all his labours came to this: that more was absolutely necessary to the very being of his Christian life than for the salvation of all the parish priests of England! He tried to engage John Wesley's conscience on the side of going to Epworth. "Are you not ordained?" he asked. "Did you not

deliberately and openly promise to instruct, to teach, to admonish, to exhort those committed to your charge? Did you equivocate then with so vile a reservation as to purpose in your heart that you would never have a charge? It is not a college, it is not a University, it is the order of the Church according to which you were called." He had taken orders, in a word, not that he might be a tutor in a college, but have a cure of souls. "The order of the Church," cries Samuel, "stakes you down, and the more you struggle you will be held the faster. If there be such a thing as truth I insist upon it you must, when opportunity offers, either perform that promise or repent of it."

But John was too alert a logician to be caught by his brother's argument. A priest who refused *all* cure of souls would, no doubt, be faithless; but was it perjury to reject the first parochial charge offered to him? His conscience, however, was troubled. "I own," he says, "I am not the proper judge of the oath I took at ordination. Accordingly, the post after I received yours I referred it to the 'high priest of God' before whom I contracted that engagement, proposing this single question to him: whether I had at my ordination engaged myself to undertake the cure of a parish or no." The appeal to the bishop in such terms shows the legal conscience in Wesley. He would keep the letter of the bond; but he must have it interpreted in the letter, and by official authority!

His bishop replied: "No; provided you can as a clergyman better serve God and His Church in your present or some other station."

Wesley thus escaped the net of his brother's logic; yet, ten months afterwards, with strange inconsistency, he left Oxford for Georgia, doing the very thing which he declared an anxious regard for his own spiritual health made it impossible for him to do, even though sacred interests—the comfort of an aged father, the future of his mother and his sisters—hung upon it. His brother's logic, in the long run, proved too much for John Wesley's conscience. There is some evidence, indeed, that after his father's death Wesley did actually apply for the living, but Sir Robert Walpole was unfriendly and the application failed.

No one can read the letters which passed at this time betwixt John Wesley and his old and dying father—his plain-spoken brother Samuel acting as a sort of chorus—without seeing how thoroughly self-centred, and how wanting in robust fibre is the younger Wesley's piety at that time. He is so occupied in thinking about his own soul that he can spare no thought for any one else. And of his own soul he thinks in a fashion at once so morbid and so timorous that it is clear he has scarcely mastered yet the first letters in the great spiritual alphabet of Christianity.

Wesley's father died on April 25, 1735, and nothing in the whole story of his life is so beautiful as the manner of his leaving it. Years had mellowed him. Time had cooled the restlessness of his blood. Sickness had given a new perspective to his theology, a new tenderness to his spirit. As he drew near the mysterious borderland of eternity his piety deepened; it was baptized with new influences.

Both John and Charles Wesley were with him at the last, and, in a letter dated April 30, 1735, Charles describes to his brother Samuel the manner of their father's death. Something of that strange vision which comes to dying eyes was granted the old man. "He often," writes Charles Wesley, "laid his hand upon my head and said, 'Be steady! The Christian faith will surely revive in this kingdom. You shall see it, though I shall not.'" To John he said: "The inward witness, son; the inward witness! That is the strongest proof of Christianity."

That "inward witness" had come late to the old man, but it had come. To his son it was then an unknown experience. The very words were cryptic; they belonged to an unknown language. "I did not," says John, when telling the story afterwards, "I did not, at that time, understand them." Yet what thrilled in the soul of the dying father was the very force which was later to transfigure his son's life and, through him, to change the whole religious history of England.

Just as the end came John stooped over his father and asked him whether he was not near heaven? "He answered," writes Charles, "distinctly and with the utmost of hope and triumph that could be expressed in sounds:

'Yes, I am.' Just after my brother had used the commendatory prayer he spoke again: 'Now you have done all.' These were his last words."

Mr. Wesley left his household but ill provided for. He rented a few fields, and the live stock upon them was seized on the very day of his funeral, by a hard landlord, for the unpaid rent. Charles had not yet taken his degree; John's fellowship scarcely did more than provide for his own wants, and the burden of the support of Mrs. Wesley and her unmarried daughters fell on Samuel. The father had finished, before his death, his *magnum opus*—a commentary on the Book of Job—and Wesley went to London to present a copy to the Queen.

While in London Dr. Burton, of Corpus Christi College, who was one of the trustees of the new colony of Georgia, introduced him to General Oglethorpe, the founder of the colony. The trustees were at that moment in search of a clergyman who could preach to the settlers and to the Indians in their neighbourhood, and Wesley seemed to them to be exactly the man for the post. He was a scholar, a clergyman of known and intense zeal, with a passion for religious work which, to cooler temperaments, seemed fanaticism. It might have been supposed that the logic which forbade John Wesley leaving Oxford to go to Epworth, on account of the risks involved in a change of spiritual climate, would apply yet more forcibly to the new scheme. But Wesley had unconsciously shifted his ground. His conscience had arrayed itself on the side of his brother's arguments.

Moreover, University groups are in their very nature temporary. Mere time dissolves them. The members must scatter to their separate careers; and this was happening at Oxford. Morgan was dead; Gambold and Ingham were about to accept cures. Whitefield, not yet ordained, was starting for evangelistic work in Gloucestershire. Broughton was chaplain at the Tower. The goodly fellowship of the Holy Club at Oxford, like the knighthood of King Arthur's Round Table, was dissolving. And Wesley, with other ties one by one snapping, listened with not unwilling ears to this new call.

It is clear, in addition, that Wesley himself, if he had not grown tired of the Holy Club and its methods, had

visibly lost faith in it and them. Its round of mechanical prayers, its pious services, its physical austerities, were but a spiritual treadmill, and yielded no more progress than a treadmill. It led no whither. Wesley had been on it six years, and *knew*. At the end of those weary, high-strung, earnest years he felt there was in religion a secret that evaded his search, a strength unpossessed, a joy untasted. How could spiritual life be translated into mechanical terms and not perish in the process?

At first Wesley refused the offer of the mission to Georgia, but it was with an accent which invited its renewal. He declared he could not leave his mother, for whose support and comfort he was indispensable. Would he go, he was asked, if his mother consented? Wesley thought this impossible, but agreed that she should be consulted. If he expected her to refuse he strangely misread the lofty and courageous temper of his mother's mind. "Had I twenty sons," the brave woman answered, "I should rejoice that they were all so employed, though I should never see them more."

Wesley, however, did not take even his mother's consent as final. He consulted many other advisers, from William Law, and his brother Samuel, to John Byrom the poet. All agreed that he should go. Samuel, no doubt, hoped that the fresh airs of the new world, and the rough schooling of a new life, would chase out of his brother's character some morbid elements.

On September 18, 1735, Wesley agreed to go. He was thirty-two years of age; he possessed the best scholarship of his time; he had practised at Oxford the austerities of an ascetic, and had shown he possessed a natural genius for leadership. The Georgia trustees counted themselves lucky in securing such a man. Many of Wesley's friends, however, were sorely disappointed. The Georgia appointment seemed a mere black eclipse falling on a brilliant career. Wesley, to justify himself, explained his motives in a remarkable letter, dated October 10, which is worth quoting at length:—

"My chief motive is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen. They have no comments to construe away the text;

no vain philosophy to corrupt it; no luxurious, sensual, covetous, ambitious expounders to soften its unpleasing truths. They have no party, no interest to serve, and are therefore fit to receive the Gospel in its simplicity. They are as little children—humble, willing to learn, and eager to do the will of God.

"A right faith will, I trust, by the mercy of God open the way for a right practice; especially when most of the temptations are removed which here so easily beset me. It will be no small thing to be able, without fear of giving offence, to live on water and the fruits of the earth. An Indian hut affords no food for curiosity, no gratification of the desire of grand or new or pretty things. The pomp and show of the world have no place in the wilds of America.

". . . I have been a grievous sinner from my youth up, and am yet laden with foolish and hurtful desires; but I am assured, if I be once converted myself, God will then employ me both to strengthen my brethren and to preach His Name to the Gentiles.

"I cannot hope to attain to the same degree of holiness here which I may there. I shall lose nothing I desire to keep. I shall still have food to eat and raiment to put on; and if any man have a desire of other things, let him know that the greatest blessing that can possibly befall him is to be cut off from all occasions of gratifying those desires which, unless speedily rooted out, will drown his soul in everlasting perdition."[1]

This letter explains exactly what aspect the Georgia mission wore to Wesley himself, and with what motive he undertook it. Why did he go to preach the Gospel to American Indians? "My chief motive," he says, "is the hope of saving my own soul." *His own soul* is still his chief preoccupation. It bulks, to his own distressed gaze, so large that it shuts out of sight all the human race beside! He is conscious that he has not yet learnt the true secret of the Gospel of Christ, and in that he was perfectly correct. He hopes to discover it for himself, however, by the process of teaching it to a heathen community on the other side of the world!

Here is a missionary, in a word, who does not possess a creed, but who is starting on a cruise in search of one! He hopes not so much to impart it to the dark-skinned savages whom he is to teach, but to extract it from them!

The note of weariness with Oxford, and with the

[1] Wesley's Works, vol. vii. p. 35.

spiritual processes of the Holy Club, is audible throughout this letter. His peaceful room in the quadrangle of Lincoln College, under the shadow of the famous Lincoln vine, with a little circle of pale and studious faces bending over their Greek Testaments round his table—he is eager to exchange all this for a wind-blown American prairie, and a company of half-clad Indians! The College chapel with its pealing organ, its murmur of incessant prayers, its decorous and learned audience, oppresses him. What he had not found in the atmosphere of an ancient university he hopes to discover amongst the rough settlers of the new land, or—with still greater hope—from the untutored savages wandering through its forests.

He drew a picture of these delightful savages so glowing that one astonished correspondent—a lady—exclaimed, with feminine directness of logic, "Why, Mr. Wesley, if they are all this already, what more can Christianity do for them?"

But perhaps the flower of a true Christian faith, which refused to grow amid the heavy airs of Oxford, *might* blossom on the rough soil of Georgia. Wesley would revise his creed by the unspoiled consciences of his Indian hearers. "I cannot hope," he says, "to attain the same degree of holiness here which I may there." Only ten months before he had declared the only place on earth where he could hope to keep the faintest pulse of religious life beating in his blood was Oxford. The change to the spiritual climate of Epworth would simply kill it. Now he flees from Oxford as the best means of saving his soul!

Methodism has sent out, since then, a thousand missionaries to heathen lands, but never one with so strange an equipment of motives as that under which its own founder sailed as a missionary to Georgia. But if any proof is needed of the failure of the religious creed on which Wesley had hitherto lived—a High Church theology, a plodding, heavy-footed ritualism—it may be found in the explanation of his own motives which Wesley gives.

# CHAPTER VI

## A STRANGE MISSIONARY

WESLEY'S misson to America, as we have seen, might be fitly described as a pilgrimage in search of a religion. And it was a pilgrimage which failed! He embarked for Georgia on October 13, 1735, and landed on his return at Deal on February 1, 1738, thus spending nearly two years and a half in the experiment. He emerged from it, in the end, more profoundly dissatisfied with himself than at the beginning. The spiritual progress of those twenty-eight arduous and suffering months can be measured by two significant extracts with dates. On October 10, 1735, before embarking for Georgia, he describes in words already quoted what he expected to find in America:—

"My chief motive is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen. . . . I cannot hope to attain the same degree of holiness here which I may there."

In his Journal, when on his way back from America, he sums up what he had actually gained under American skies:—

"I went to America to convert the Indians; but, O! who shall convert me? . . . It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity; but what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why, what I the least of all suspected; that I who went to America to convert others was never myself converted to God."

It is true that when, many years afterwards, Wesley reprinted those sentences in his Journal, he added the significant note, "I am not sure of this"; but the words at least expressed faithfully his judgment on himself when he landed on English soil again. He had gone to

America in the hope of finding there what Oxford and the Holy Club had failed to yield him—a clear religious experience. He returns with a more bitter and crushing self-discontent than ever. And the story of those months on a strange soil and under strange skies is not the least instructive chapter in Wesley's spiritual history.

The little group of missionaries consisted of John Wesley, his brother Charles—who held the post of secretary to General Oglethorpe, the governor of the colony—Benjamin Ingham, and Charles Delamotte, both members of the Holy Club. Two others, Hall and Salmon, were to join the party; but Hall, who was Wesley's brother-in-law, almost at the moment of embarkation received news of his appointment to a benefice, and promptly unpacked his luggage. He was not of the stuff of which martyrs and saints are made! Salmon was intercepted by his friends and prevented from going, almost by force.

The voyage lasted from October 14, 1735, to February 5, 1736, a fact which shows how leisurely was the navigation of those days. With the voyage begins Wesley's immortal Journal, a bit of literature once strangely neglected, and now almost over-praised. For naturalness, incident, variety, and imperishable interest it undoubtedly deserves to be classed with "Boswell." Over Boswell's "Johnson," indeed, the Journal has the advantage that it deals with a greater figure than even the famous lexicographer, and the hero of it is also the writer. The Journal, again, is not a book of gossip, it is an autobiography. It gives us Wesley, not as seen from the outside, but as Wesley saw himself. It enables us, in a word, to look at men, books, and events through John Wesley's eyes, and to see Wesley himself as interpreted—and sometimes as misinterpreted—by his own conscience.

If the voyage was leisurely, Wesley and his companions spent it in no leisurely mood. They began by drawing up and signing a solemn bond betwixt themselves. It bears date November 3, and runs:—

"In the name of God, Amen! We, whose names are underwritten, being fully convinced that it is impossible either to promote the work of God among the heathen without an entire union

among ourselves, or that such a union should subsist unless each one will give up his single judgment to that of the majority, do agree, by the help of God:—First, that none of us will undertake anything of importance without first proposing it to the other three; secondly, that whenever our judgments differ, any one shall give up his single judgment or inclination to the others; thirdly, that in case of an equality, after begging God's direction, the matter shall be decided by lot.

JOHN WESLEY.
CHARLES WESLEY.
BENJAMIN INGHAM.
CHARLES DELAMOTTE."

Here we have Wesley's instinct for order and fellowship registering itself. The missionaries were not to be separate units, but a disciplined company. In the last words of that bond, too, we have the practice of sortilege—which runs intermittently through all Wesley's after years—erected into a law and made the ultimate standard of decision in all doubtful matters.

The voyage was regarded by the little group as an opportunity for trying all sorts of heroic experiments with themselves. It gave them a welcome chance of shedding old habits. They reduced the number of their meals, and limited their diet to rice and biscuits. Wesley, owing to an accident, had to sleep on the floor one night without a bed, and so made the delightful discovery that a bed was a superfluity. It could in future be dispensed with. The ascetic, not to say the monk, was emerging once more in Wesley's life! He acted on the theory that his soul was a besieged fortress, and each physical sense was an avenue standing wide open to his foes. An appetite starved into submission, or otherwise suppressed, was a traitor hanged!

In other ways the ship that carried these strange missionaries was turned into a floating monastery. Each hour of the day was assigned to a specific task. They rose at four o'clock in the morning, and went through a succession of ordered tasks—meditations and spiritual exercises—that left not one moment of perilous space for leisure, till ten o'clock at night when sleep came.

One incident of the voyage served as a sharp test to Wesley of his own spiritual condition. Amongst the

passengers he found a little group of Moravian exiles, who, by the simplicity and seriousness of their piety, strangely interested him. A storm broke over the ship one evening just as these simple-minded Germans had begun a religious service; Wesley describes what follows:—

"In the midst of the Psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began amongst the English. The Germans calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, 'Was you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.' I asked, 'But were not your women and children afraid?' He replied mildly, 'No; our women and children are not afraid to die.' From them I went to their crying, trembling neighbours, and pointed out to them the difference in the hour of trial between him that feareth God and him that feareth Him not."

Now, Wesley knew that he had not mastered the secret of that strange contempt of death. "I have a sin of fear," he said then, and for many a day afterwards. And he knew that the touch of death has for religion the office of an acid on gold. It is a test—the most searching of tests. And under the touch of that dreadful acid of fear, Wesley's religion at this stage failed him.

It was not that he recoiled from the mere icy breath of death; else would he have had less courage than the recruiting sergeant can buy in every market for a few pence a day. But there are mysterious elements in death, which make it the symbol of sin's triumph, the crowning act of sin's dark reign. The human soul is dimly conscious that in moral evil there are dark and strange forces—depths unsounded, relations with God and His universe unrealised—and death brings the soul face to face with these last and uttermost elements of wrong-doing. So it is that sin and death, while strangely akin, are strangely abhorrent to each other. And as Wesley's religion at this stage failed to deliver him from the fear of death, he judged, rightly enough, that he had not yet found in it any complete deliverance from sin, death's sad ancestress.

Directly he landed, too, Wesley found himself face to

face with the challenge of what was to him a quite new type of piety. He eagerly sought out the head of the little Moravian community, August Spangenberg, and, with that fine humility which was characteristic of one side of his nature, asked his advice—as Wesley himself puts it—"with regard to my own conduct." The simple-minded Moravian pastor proceeded to put Wesley to the question:—

"He said, 'My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?'

"'I was surprised,' records Wesley, 'and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" I paused and said, "I know He is the Saviour of the world."

"'True,' he replied; 'but do you know He has saved you?'

"'I answered, "I hope He has died to save me." He only added, "Do you know yourself?" I said, "I do." But I fear they were vain words.'"

Wesley was the last man in the world to resent questioning so frank and courageous; but it is clear that the challenge of the plain-spoken Moravian disquieted him. He does not seem to have been struck by the circumstance that an echo of his father's dying words—"The inward witness, son, the inward witness"—from the lips of a man of another race and another theological school, thus met him as he put his foot on the soil of the new world.

Wesley, however, was strangely drawn to the Moravians. He lived with them for a while, and saw their piety in what might be called its household dress. It was the most beautiful form of piety he had yet witnessed—the ordered devoutness and diligence of the Epworth Rectory repeated, with a strain of gladness running through it the Epworth household hardly knew. Wesley was present, again, at a Moravian service held for the election and ordination of a bishop, and he records how the grave simplicity of the proceedings made him forget the seventeen centuries that had fled, and imagine himself in one of those assemblies where form and state were not, but Paul the tentmaker, or Peter the fisherman, presided.

It is curious to note, however, that though the simplicity of Moravian piety moved Wesley's admiration, and the certainty of Moravian faith awakened his envy, yet all this did not in the least abate the fury of his own sacerdotal zeal. The very centre of his religion was, no doubt, unconsciously shifting; but the outer crust of the High Churchman—the external habit of his life—was almost more rigid and austere than ever.

It was a strange human field on which Wesley was now at work. The colony of Georgia represents, perhaps, the most generous experiment in settlement known to history. Its founder was General Oglethorpe—scholar, soldier, politician, knight-errant, philanthropist, and through it all—for he was the son of an Irish mother—a generous, hot-blooded, irresponsible Irishman. He had been a student at Oxford, a soldier in the British Army; he had fought on the Continent under Prince Eugene, and in the British Parliament had anticipated Howard as a philanthropist. The condition of debtors in English prisons moved his warm-hearted pity. He secured the appointment of a Parliamentary Committee to report on the condition of the great English prisons, the Fleet and the Marshalsea; and as an incidental result, the plan for forming a settlement in South Carolina emerged. The settlement was vested in trustees; Oglethorpe was appointed governor; large sums of money were raised to start the colony; and a code of regulations was drawn up, which, if not in every detail of perfect wisdom, at least represented very noble ideals.

One clause prohibited slavery, as contrary not only to the Gospel, but to the fundamental laws of England. It would have been well for the Southern States of America, and for the whole history of the English-speaking race, if Oglethorpe's regulations for his settlement at this point had been universally adopted. Their absence was, later, to cost the United States the most dreadful civil war known to history. The most difficult social and political problem the great transatlantic Republic has to solve would never have existed if the Georgian precedent had been followed.

But the new colony not only represented a great social experiment; it offered a refuge for social failures of every

kind — English debtors, Highland Jacobites, Moravian refugees, the wrecks of commerce and of politics, the victims of religious persecution. The settlement was thus a cluster of unrelated human atoms, representing social, political, and racial types of very diverse kinds. It was, moreover, planted on the soil, and breathed the airs of a new world, with ancient conventions forgotten, and a new liberty fermenting in its very blood. It constituted an ideal field for social and religious experiments. And, as his contribution to the peace of the new settlement, Wesley was bent on enforcing, by priestly discipline, the strictest reading of the rubric! He would stamp the usages—or what he imagined to be the usages—of the first Christian century on a community living in the eighteenth!

This proves how completely the ecclesiastic and the sacerdotalist were dominant in Wesley. He worked solely on what may be called the ecclesiastical plane. Thus he instituted both early and forenoon services for every day. He divided the morning service, taking the Litany apart. He celebrated the Lord's Supper every week, but refused it to all who had not been episcopally baptized. He revived what he believed to be the Apostolic practice of baptism by immersion. He rebaptized the children of dissenters, and refused admission to the Lord's Supper to the pastor of the Salzburgers because—though he had been baptized—it was not done in severely correct canonical fashion. Nearly twenty years afterwards, recalling this incident, he wrote, "Can High Church bigotry go farther than this? And how well since I have been beaten with mine own staff." The indictment against Wesley, drawn up by the grand jury of Savannah in 1737, consists of ten articles, and to one of these Wesley with every sign of penitence pleaded guilty. His crime consisted of having baptized an Indian trader's child with only two sponsors! "This," cries the conscience-stricken ritualist, "I own, was wrong; I ought at all hazards to have refused baptizing it till he had procured a third."

There spoke the true High Churchman, who not only believes that spiritual and eternal issues hang on mechanical forms, but will sacrifice them for the sake

of the forms! On Wesley's theory the eternal destiny of the child turned on its being baptized. Yet, even at that dreadful hazard, Wesley believed he ought to have refused to baptize it in the absence of a third sponsor!

But if Wesley's standard was severe for others, it was nothing less than heroic for himself. Zeal for high ideals of conduct and service burnt in him like a flame. There were no austerities of self-denial from which he shrank. He visited his parishioners from house to house in order, taking for that business the hours betwixt twelve and three, when all work was suspended on account of the heat. He lived with the plainness and simplicity of an anchorite. In one of the schools which he and Delamotte taught, some of the poorer scholars went barefoot, and the more comfortably dressed children looked down with contempt on their unshod companions. To cure that pride Wesley himself, for a while, went with naked feet. He lived practically on dry bread, and interspersed even that rudimentary diet with incessant fasts. The social impulse in Wesley reappears in Georgia. A wise and sure instinct warned him that a solitary religion would perish, and, as at Oxford, he organised his flock into little societies which met once a week, or oftener, in order to improve, instruct, and exhort one another.

But Wesley's ministry at Savannah failed, exactly as it did at Wroot, and with even more dramatic completeness. It was empty of true spiritual force. It failed to make men better. It bred strife. "How is it," asked Oglethorpe, bewildered by the ecclesiastical quarrels that filled the air on every side—"how is it that there is no love, no meekness, no true religion amongst the people; but instead of this, mere formal prayers?" Wesley, in Southey's words, instead of feeding his flock with milk, was "drenching them with the physic of an intolerant discipline"; and human nature rebelled against the bitter dose.

One angry parishioner—as Wesley faithfully records in his Journal—told him, "I like nothing you do. All your sermons are satires upon particular persons; therefore I will never hear you more, and all the people are of my mind." His puzzled hearers, this plain-spoken

critic went on to say, were unable to decide whether Wesley was a Protestant or a Roman Catholic. "They never heard of such a religion before. They do not know what to make of it. And then your private behaviour. All the quarrels that have been here since you came have been along of you. . . . And so you may preach long enough, but nobody will come to hear you."

If at Savannah his parishioners were quarrelling with John Wesley, at Frederica both the governor and the people were in angry feud with Charles Wesley. Charles was as austere as his brother John, and had, perhaps, even less tact. Within a month his parishioners were in open rebellion against him, and tried to ruin him with the governor by accusing him of a design to destroy the colony. The unfortunate governor found that his chaplains were mere human storm-centres. "What would an unbeliever say to your raising these disorders?" he demanded of Charles Wesley in bitter tones.

Oglethorpe was a man of impetuous temper and unrestrained speech; his underlings naturally exaggerated these qualities, and outvied him in the steps they took against the unfortunate chaplain. Charles Wesley was practically denied the ordinary necessaries of existence. A bed was provided out of the public stores to every one else in the settlement, but denied to the too zealous divine, who, while suffering from a low fever, had yet to sleep on the ground. "Thank God," said poor Charles Wesley, "it is not yet made capital to give me a morsel of bread!" But his life, he seriously believed, was more than once attempted.

Oglethorpe a little later was starting out to meet a descent by the Spaniards upon the new settlement. The odds against him were desperate; he believed he would never return, and he took leave of his secretary and chaplain in very high-strung fashion.

"'I am now going to death,' he said. 'You will see me no more.'

"'If I am speaking to you for the last time,' replied his secretary, 'hear what you will quickly know to be the truth as soon as you are entered upon a separate state. . . . I have renounced the world. Life is a bitterness to me. I came hither to lay it down.

You have been deceived. I protest my innocence of the crimes I am charged with, and think myself now at liberty to tell you what I thought never to have uttered.'"

An explanation followed; Oglethorpe, the most generous, if the most impulsive of men, fell on his chaplain's neck and kissed him, and so they parted.

"God is with you," cried Charles Wesley as the boats moved off. "Go forth, *Christo duce et auspice Christo.*"

When Oglethorpe returned safe from his expedition, Charles told him he had longed to see him once more to give further explanations; "but then," he added, "I considered that if you died you would know them all in a moment."

"I know not," said Oglethorpe, "whether separate spirits regard our little concerns. If they do, it is as men regard the follies of their childhood, or I my late passionateness."

Oglethorpe could quarrel with his chaplains furiously, but he loved them; and, many years afterwards, when he himself was a white-haired and venerable figure—the finest figure, as Hannah More declares, she ever knew, and one which "perfectly realised her ideal of Nestor"—it is on record that, meeting John Wesley unexpectedly, he ran to him and kissed him with the simplicity and affection of a child.

Charles Wesley, with his comrade, Ingham, returned to England in July 1736, but John Wesley clung resolutely to his post. The puzzle is that his High Church temper was so little influenced by the admiration he felt for Moravian teaching, and the type of piety it produced. The Moravians of Savannah taught him exactly what Peter Böhler taught him afterwards in London, but the teaching at the moment left his life unaffected. Wesley's own explanation is, "I understood it not: I was too learned and too wise, so that it seemed foolishness unto me; and I continued preaching, and following after, and trusting in that righteousness whereby no flesh can be justified."

The truth is that Peter Böhler himself, had he met Wesley in Savannah, would have taught him in vain. The stubborn Sacramentarian and High Churchman had

to be scourged, by the sharp discipline of failure, out of that subtlest and deadliest form of pride, the pride that imagines that the secret of salvation lies, or can lie, within the circle of purely human effort. Wesley later describes Peter Böhler as "one whom God prepared for me." But God, in the toilsome and humiliating experiences of Georgia, was preparing Wesley for Peter Böhler.

A love episode, as ill-managed and as barren as were all Wesley's excursions into the realm of sentiment, brought his stay in Georgia to a hasty and inglorious end. Wesley, from his youth, both by temperament and by the manner of his training, was peculiarly susceptible—though in no ignoble fashion—to feminine influence. In the Epworth Rectory feminine influences—from the wise, serene, strong-brained mother, to the circle of bright-witted sisters—were supreme; and Wesley, at every stage of his life, sought—what had been the joy of his early years—the companionship of intelligent women. But where the sex was concerned, he suffered a curious paralysis of his native shrewdness, and he managed his love affairs worse than perhaps any other great man known to history.

The chief magistrate of Savannah, Mr. Causton, was a man of doubtful antecedents and violent temper. His niece, Miss Hopkey, a clever and attractive girl, fell in love with Wesley—or at least was anxious that the little, handsome, and clever Fellow of Lincoln College should fall in love with her, and she plainly endeavoured, by all the innocent arts known to the sex, to hasten that desirable consummation. She became pensively religious to suit Wesley's mood; attended his services with pious diligence; dressed to suit his austere taste; nursed him through a sickness; took his advice on the interesting question of what she should eat for supper, and how soon she should go to bed.

Wesley accepted all this with exquisite simplicity, as signs of an angelic character. He was visibly and frankly —if somewhat pedantically—in love with her. In the beginning of December he records in his Journal, "I advised Miss Sophie to sup earlier and not immediately before going to bed. She did so, and on this little circumstance depend what an inconceivable train of conse-

quences! Not only all the colour of remaining life for her, but perhaps my happiness too."

His companion, Delamotte, who contemplated Miss Hopkey through no nimbus of sentiment, and who had not been at Oxford for nothing, bluntly warned Wesley, and asked him if it was his intention to marry her. Wesley—at this stage of his life a chill-blooded ecclesiastic, even when in love—found he could not answer that inconveniently direct query. He determined to submit the question of whether he ought to marry Miss Hopkey to the Moravian Bishop—a step which, to the feminine mind at least, will prove decisively that he was not in love with that young lady at all. The matter was finally referred, for decision, to the elders of the Moravian Church—strange assessors in the court of the affections! They solemnly considered the case. Wesley was called in to learn his fate.

"Will you abide by our decision?" Nitschman asked him.

After some hesitation, Wesley replied, "I will."

"Then," said the Moravian, "we advise you to proceed no further in the matter."

"The will of the Lord be done," answered Wesley.

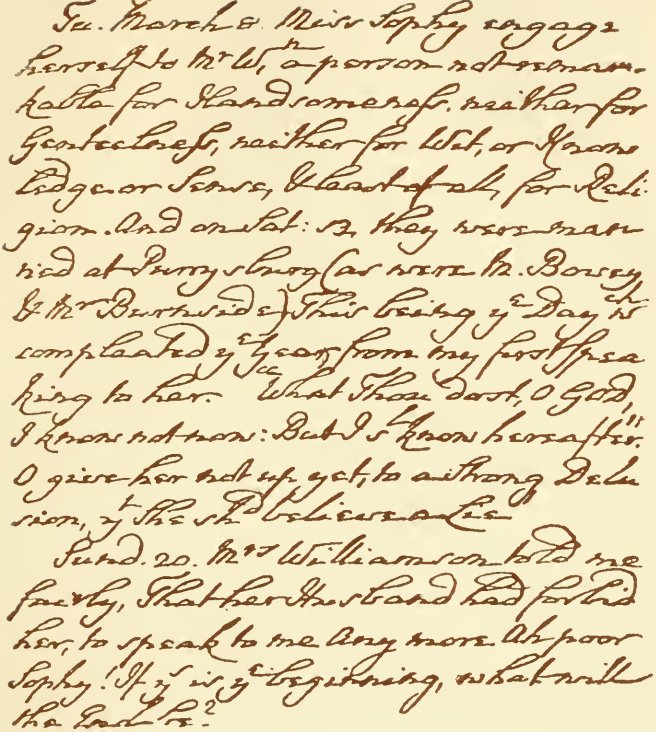
It is a matter debated still with great keenness, whether or not Wesley had actually offered himself in marriage to Miss Hopkey. Moore, his biographer, says that Wesley told him expressly, "he never actually proposed marriage." On the other hand, the young lady herself, in the proceedings against Wesley at the close of his stay in Savannah, deposed under oath that "Mr. Wesley had many times proposed marriage to her, all of which proposals she had rejected." But no one who reads the whole story can doubt that Wesley's real offence was that he failed to propose to Miss Hopkey, or, at least, to do it with sufficient definiteness.

That quick-witted young lady learned that her lover was submitting the direction of his affections to a court of venerable Moravian elders; she guessed the decision would be against her and promptly betook herself to another lover. On March 4 the Moravian elders gave their decision; on March 8, Wesley ruefully records in his Journal, "Miss Sophie engaged herself to Mr. Williamson,

a person not remarkable for handsomeness, neither for genteelness, neither for wit, nor knowledge, nor sense, and least of all for religion." And on Saturday, March 12, four days after, they were married. An expeditious young lady, this!

Wesley found in the lesson of the day for the succeeding Sunday the words, "Son of man, behold, I take from thee the desire of thine eyes at a stroke"; and, he adds, "I was pierced through as with a sword." Twelve years afterwards he was to write that same verse once more in his Journal, as the record of a yet more bitter defeat of his affections.[1]

[1] Wesley, at this period even more than in later years, had the habit of recording with an almost incredible diligence, and for the purpose of self-scrutiny, every act of his life, and every play of his feelings. His Georgian journals, which still exist, are examples of the tireless industry with which he translated himself into written terms. In the Journal there is not only a page for every day, but a separate space for every hour of the day. He computed and registered the use of his time with the fidelity with which a careful business man writes down the investments of his capital. And an incident, such as the affair with Miss Hopkey, which moved him so deeply, would naturally be recorded with special care. This makes credible the somewhat doubtful authenticity of another version of this incident, apparently in Wesley's own handwriting, known to exist. Miss Hopkey, according to this story, was only eighteen years of age; her affections had become entangled with some unworthy object, and her guardians had broken off all intercourse between the two. The girl was in much grief, and Wesley, as a clergyman, was asked to pay special attention to her. This drew the two into close relationship, and Wesley presently discovered that he had not only a high esteem for Miss Hopkey, but a tender affection for her, an affection which he persuaded himself was that for a sister. He, on his part, was convinced that a celibate life was better for all men, and for himself was almost imperative; while she, with the facile resolve of a grieved maiden, had also vowed to live for ever single. Intercourse betwixt the two was at its most perilous stage, when they took a trip by boat from Frederica to Savannah. Wesley's tenderness at this period is confessed, but still, after his pedantic fashion, he tests his emotions by extracts from the Greek Fathers. Did he actually propose to Miss Hopkey is a question the narrative after all leaves unsettled. He tells how he sat by the camp fire and asked her whether she was engaged to the person for whom she was supposed to be mourning. She replied, "I am promised to that young man or none," and straightway took refuge in tears. "Miss Sophie," said Wesley, "I should count myself happy if I could spend my life with you." These sudden words, he adds, "were not spoken of design"; the young lady replied with more tears, but the simple-minded Fellow of Lincoln College was persuaded that if even he broke through his resolve for a single life, Miss Hopkey would be heroically firm to her pledge of celibacy. This belief kept Wesley silent; yet, looking back on this incident, he calls it "a very narrow escape." "I wonder to this hour," he says, "I did not say, 'Miss Sophie, will you marry me?'" Plainly he believed that in express terms he never did speak the decisive words.



*A page from John Wesley's Journal in Georgia, re Miss Hopkey.*

LONDON: PUBLISHED BY SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE, S.W.

Wesley naturally contemplated Miss Hopkey, when she became Mrs. Williamson, with new and changed eyes, and that ingenious young lady probably felt no longer under any obligations to consult in dress or conduct the tastes of her former, and quite too leisurely, lover. This was to Wesley only another painful surprise. "God," he gravely records in his Journal, "has shown me yet more of the greatness of my deliverance by opening to me a new and unexpected scene of Miss Sophie's dissimulation." Later, Wesley felt called upon to mention to her "some things in her conduct which he thought reprehensible," and was much astonished—simple man!—at finding "Miss Sophie" resenting with shrill vehemence his rebukes. Her husband was kindled by his wife's anger, and forbade her to speak to Wesley, or to attend his services; but his self-willed bride seems to have disobeyed him. Wesley now contemplated debarring Mrs. Williamson from the Lord's Supper, and he asked Mr. Causton, the magistrate, "Sir, what if I should think it the duty of my office to repel one of your family from the Holy Communion?"

"If you repel me or my wife," answered Mr. Causton, "I shall require a legal reason; but I shall trouble myself about none else."

In those days, when the Lord's Supper was, in Cowper's phrase, a "pick-lock of office" for men, and a sign of social respectability for women, to be debarred from the table of the Lord was a serious injury. On August 7—five months after her marriage—Wesley refused to allow Mrs. Williamson to join the Lord's Supper. On the very next day a warrant was issued for the apprehension of "John Wesley, clerk, to answer the complaint of William Williamson for defaming his wife, and refusing to administer to her the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in a public congregation without cause." The enraged husband assessed his damages at £1000.

Wesley was arrested, but discharged on pledge to appear at the next session of the court. He was asked to put in writing his reasons for refusing to admit Mrs. Williamson to the Lord's Supper; he wrote to the lady: "If you offer yourself to the Lord's table on Sunday, I will advertise you, as I have done more than once wherein you have done wrong, and when you have openly

declared that you have truly repented, I will administer to you the mysteries of God." But Mrs. Williamson would not formally "notify the curate of her intention to present herself at the communion"; till she did so Wesley would not "advertise her wherein she had done wrong"; and so the sad nature of Mrs. Williamson's offence remains to this day unknown.

Meanwhile, a grand jury of forty-four persons—about one-fifth of the adult male population of the town—considered the case. There were twelve charges against Wesley, ranging from one of "inverting the order and method of the liturgy," to "searching into and meddling with affairs of private families." A majority of the grand jury found ten of these charges proved; a minority of twelve acquitted Wesley, and declared that the charges were "an artifice of Mr. Causton's, designed to blacken Mr. Wesley's character." Wesley, when called upon to plead, took the ground that nine of the ten charges were of an ecclesiastical nature, as to which the court had no jurisdiction. The tenth, that of speaking and writing to Mrs. Williamson, was of a secular character, and he demanded to be heard upon it at once.

His enemies, however, were in no haste to bring the issue to a trial. They wished to use the charges as a device for driving Wesley from the colony. The military chaplain at Frederica was appointed to conduct religious services in Savannah, and Wesley's office was thus practically taken from him.

The weeks crept on; Wesley found that he could neither secure a trial nor do his work as chaplain, and he determined to sail for England. He posted up a paper in the great square, with the announcement, "Whereas John Wesley designs shortly to set out for England," &c. He was notified that he must not leave the settlement till he had answered the charges against him. Wesley answered that he had already attended seven sessions of the court for that purpose, and had been refused the opportunity of pleading. He refused to sign any bond pledging himself to appear before the court, and an order was published requiring all loyal persons to prevent him leaving the settlement. He was, in substance, a prisoner at large. Wesley's enemies, it is clear, wished not only to drive

him from the settlement, but to make his departure wear the look of a flight from justice.

Wesley conducted evening prayers that day; and then, he says, "about 8 o'clock, the tide then serving, I shook off the dust from my feet and left Georgia, after having preached the Gospel there not as I ought, but as I was able, one year and nearly nine months." A troublesome journey, partly by boat, and partly on foot, brought Wesley and his three companions to Charleston, and ten days later, on December 22, he set sail for England. A strangely troubled chapter in his life was closed.

# CHAPTER VII

## REACHING THE GOAL

WESLEY returned from America a visibly defeated man. His ministry had failed; his character was damaged; his future was dark. He was not exactly a fugitive from the law, but his own flock had used the law to drive him from their shores. He would land in England hopelessly discredited; and as he meditated during the long eventless days of the return voyage, Wesley saw all this in clearest vision. His career was marred, if not wrecked.

But Wesley was the last man in the world to dwell on any injury to his reputation, or to his pocket, or to his secular career. The tragedy of the situation, he felt, lay in the fact that he was a spiritual failure. His religion, with its passionate zeal, its heroic intensity, its unsparing self-sacrifice, yet gave neither peace to his own heart nor power to reach the hearts of others. This is the bitter analysis of his own spiritual state at this moment:—

"*Tuesday, January* 24, 1738.—I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near: but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, 'To die is gain!'

> 'I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun
> My last thread I shall perish on the shore!'

"I think, verily, if the Gospel be true, I am safe; for I not only have given, and do give, all my goods to feed the poor; I not only give my body to be burned, drowned, or whatever God shall appoint for me; but I follow after charity (though not as I ought, yet as I can), if haply I may attain it. I now believe the Gospel is true. 'I show my faith by my works,' by staking my all upon it. I would do so again and again a thousand times, if the choice were still to make. Whoever sees me, sees I would be a Christian. Therefore 'are my ways not like other men's ways.'

Therefore I have been, I am content to be, 'a byword, a proverb of reproach.' But in a storm I think, '*What if the Gospel be not true?*'"

This is a bitter record; it makes plain the shadow under which Wesley was living.

Wesley was a lonely man, too, on that sad voyage. Delamotte was left behind in America; Charles Wesley and Ingham were already in England. Wesley had no companionship but his own bitter thoughts, and his mood of depression is reflected in every line of his Journal. He describes himself as being "sorrowful and very heavy, though I could give no particular reason for it." He notes in himself "a fearfulness and heaviness," which almost continually weighed him down. There is a touch of keenest pathos in the sentences he writes in his Journal. "I went to America to convert the Indians, but, oh, who shall convert me?" He proceeds to deliberately assess himself, and it is with a severity of self-judgment little less than cruel. His words must be quoted in full, with the significant footnotes in brackets and in italics, which Wesley himself appended in later years, and which represent his own wiser judgment on himself:—

"It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country, in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity; but what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why (what I the least of all suspected), that I who went to America to convert others was never myself converted to God. [*I am not sure of this.*] 'I am not mad,' though I thus speak; but, 'I speak the words of truth and soberness'; if haply some of those who still dream may awake, and see, that as I am, so are they.

"Are they read in philosophy? So was I. In ancient or modern tongues? So was I also. Are they versed in the science of divinity? I, too, have studied it many years. Can they talk fluently upon spiritual things? The very same could I do. Are they plenteous in alms? Behold, I gave all my goods to feed the poor. Do they give of their labour as well as of their substance? I have laboured more abundantly than they all. Are they willing to suffer for their brethren? I have thrown up my friends, reputation, ease, country; I have put my life in my hand, wandering into strange lands; I have given my body to be devoured by the deep, parched up with heat, consumed by toil and weariness, or whatsoever God should please to bring upon me. But does all

this (be it more or less, it matters not) make me acceptable to God? Does all I ever did or can know, say, give, do, or suffer, justify me in His sight? Yea, or the constant use of all the means of grace (which, nevertheless, is meet, right, and our bounden duty)? Or that I know nothing of myself; that I am as touching outward moral righteousness, blameless? Or, to come closer yet, the having a rational conviction of all the truths of Christianity? Does all this give me a claim to the holy, heavenly, divine character of a Christian? By no means. If the oracles of God are true; if we are still to abide by 'the law and the testimony,' all these things, though, when ennobled by faith in Christ [*I had even then the faith of a servant, though not that of a son*], they are holy and just and good, yet without it are 'dung and dross,' meet only to be purged away by 'the fire that never shall be quenched.'

"This, then, have I learned in the ends of the earth, that I 'am fallen short of the glory of God'; that my whole heart is 'altogether corrupt and abominable'; and, consequently, my whole life; seeing it cannot be, that an 'evil tree' should 'bring forth good fruit': that 'alienated' as I am from the life of God, I am a 'child of wrath' [*I believe not*], an heir of hell: that my own works, my own sufferings, my own righteousness, are so far from reconciling me to an offended God, so far from making any atonement for the least of those sins, which 'are more in number than the hairs of my head,' that the most specious of them need an atonement themselves, or they cannot abide His righteous judgment. . . .

"If it be said that I have faith (for many such things have I heard, from many miserable comforters), I answer, So have the devils—a sort of faith; but still they are strangers to the covenant of promise. So the Apostles had even at Cana in Galilee, when Jesus first 'manifested forth His glory'; even then they, in a sort, 'believed on Him'; but they had not then 'the faith that overcometh the world.' The faith I want is [*the faith of a son*], 'A sure trust and confidence in God, that, through the merits of Christ, my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God.'"[1]

That, even allowing for the qualifying footnotes of a later date, is a bit of very terrible self-description. Wesley, it is clear, was in no mood to write soft things about himself. Later, we may discuss whether the verdict Wesley passes on himself in this mood of depressed feeling was quite accurate; meanwhile, the mood itself is worth noting. His pride is gone. The sense of defeat and failure is complete. He knows there is something in Christianity

[1] Journal, February 1, 1738.

not yet attained. His mood is one of utter self-abasement:—

"All my works, all my righteousness, my prayers, need an atonement for themselves; so that my mouth is stopped. I have nothing to plead. God is holy; I am unholy. God is a consuming fire; I am altogether a sinner, meet to be consumed."

The Wesley who embarked for Georgia in 1735 and the Wesley who returned to England in 1738 are thus wholly different men. Wesley had put his theology once more, as at Wroot, to the test of actual life, and it had failed. He had not converted the Indians; he had only learned that he was not converted himself. There must be some fatal flaw in his creed or in his methods. The essential secret of Christianity—its gift of peace to the conscience, and of power over men—evaded him. Why had he failed? What was it turned such high courage, such splendid devotion, such unsparing self-denials, to mere failure? Who reads the secret of Wesley's failure has got to the very heart of Christianity.

This new mood had, of course, its gains. For one thing, Wesley's theology, from this point, passes out of the pendulum condition. He had already, as we have seen, abandoned mysticism; he had seen its deadly nature. Ritualism, too, had failed. It only bred strife. His own austere legalism left the spirit unfed. This ascetic found that a harried body did not ensure a soul at peace. And from this point conscience and intellect in Wesley swung definitely to the evangelical reading of Christianity.

All this was, visibly, a stage in a great spiritual process. Wesley was being prepared for the touch of another teacher, and for the entrance into his life of a new experience.

As Wesley landed, the ship in which Whitefield was about to sail for America lay at anchor in the Downs. Wesley had looked forward to the inspiration of Whitefield's comradeship; and he grudged sending so fine a spirit to the thankless work he himself had abandoned at Savannah. He promptly sent a note to Whitefield on board his ship. "When I saw God by the wind which was carrying you out brought me in," he wrote, "I asked counsel of God. His answer you have enclosed."

The enclosure was a slip of paper with the sentence on it, "Let him return to London." Wesley had settled the question of whether Whitefield should go or stop by sortilege, with this result. But Whitefield had a sortilege of his own, and the sudden emergence in his memory of the story of the prophet that turned back at the bidding of another prophet, and was devoured by a lion in consequence—as told in the Book of Kings—decided him to go on his voyage; and Wesley, at the most critical moment of his life, was thus left without his great comrade.

Whitefield was just then in the dawn of his amazing popularity in England. He was little more than a lad, yet crowds hung enchanted on the music of his lips. And the contrast betwixt Wesley creeping back to England a spirit-broken and defeated man, and Whitefield sailing out at the same moment with a nimbus of brilliant popularity about him, is little less than dramatic.

Wesley landed at Deal on the morning of February 1, and immediately proceeded to read prayers and preach in the house in which he lodged. Whatever was clouded in his spiritual sky, the point of duty always shone with luminous clearness. Whether his own spiritual condition was happy or unhappy, he must try to mend the spiritual condition of others. He lived in the spirit of the words which he afterwards made part of the Covenant service read every year in all the Churches he founded, "If I die, I will die at Thy door. If I sink, I will sink in Thy ship!"

He went straight to London, where he had to give an account of himself to the trustees of the settlement in Georgia, and here he met his brother Charles, to whom his arrival was an astonishment. His acquaintance with the Moravians in Savannah naturally made him turn to Moravians in London, and, on Tuesday, February 7—"a day much to be remembered," as he says in his Journal—he met at the house of a Dutch merchant Peter Böhler, a man destined to profoundly influence his life.

Böhler had been educated at Jena University, and had joined the Moravians while yet a lad. He had been ordained as a Moravian missionary by Count Zinzendorf, and was on his way to Carolina when Wesley met him.

He was just then delivering addresses, through an interpreter, to little audiences in London, and some strange spiritual influence accompanied his words.

Wesley and Böhler recognised each other, almost at the moment they met, as kindred spirits. The Moravian described Wesley to Count Zinzendorf as "a man of good principles, who knew he did not properly believe on the Saviour, and was willing to be taught." Of Charles Wesley he says, "He is at present very much distressed in his mind, but does not know how he shall begin to be acquainted with the Saviour. Our mode of believing in the Saviour seems so easy to Englishmen, that they cannot reconcile themselves to it. If it were a little more difficult, they would much sooner find their way into it. They take it for granted," said this shrewd but simple-hearted Moravian, "that they believe already, and try to prove their faith by their works, and thus so torment themselves that they are at heart very miserable."

Wesley went with Böhler to Oxford, and listened eagerly to the teaching of his new friend. He guessed dimly that here, at last, lay the secret which had evaded him so long. And yet the simple speech of the Moravian sounded, in Wesley's ears, like the accents of an unknown tongue. "I understood him not," he said, "and least of all when he said, 'Mi frater, mi frater; excoquenda est ista tua philosophia.'" What had Wesley's "philosophy" done that it was necessary to jettison it!

But Wesley was teachable, and on March 4 he records that he spent a day with Peter Böhler, "by whom, in the hands of the great God, I was, on Sunday, the 5th, clearly convinced of unbelief; of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved." Later, Wesley says, "Böhler amazed me more and more by the account he gave of fruits of faith, the love, holiness, and happiness that he affirmed to attend it." Wesley frankly accepted this teaching. True faith must produce these fruits. But Wesley was first and last a logician, and he asks himself, "How can I preach to others who have not faith myself?" Böhler's advice was direct and practical, "Preach faith till you have it," he said, "and then because you have it you will preach faith."

Coleridge burlesques this by saying that it amounts to "Tell a lie long enough and often enough, and you'll be

sure to end by believing it." But then Coleridge fails completely to understand the sense of Böhler's advice! Wesley himself was in no mood to cavil. "On the very next day, Monday, 6th," he records, "I began preaching this new doctrine, though my soul started back from the work. The first person to whom I offered salvation by faith alone was a prisoner under sentence of death," and Wesley confesses that he found the task, in this particular shape, the more difficult, "as I had been many years a zealous asserter of the impossibility of a death-bed repentance." The condemned man promptly confuted Wesley's doubts by accepting the new doctrine, and, in the divine strength bred of it, showing "a composed cheerfulness" and "a serene peace," while he stood on the very scaffold.

Wesley was convinced that Böhler's teaching as to faith and its fruits was Scriptural; nay, it was the doctrine of the Church of England itself. But a doubt yet remained. How could the great spiritual process by which a man passed from death unto life be an instantaneous work? Yet, on examination, Wesley found that almost every conversion recorded in the New Testament was an instantaneous work. It might well be, however, that what was common in the first century had become impossible in the eighteenth century. But, "on Sunday the 22nd," records Wesley, "I was beat out of this retreat, too, by the concurring evidence of several living witnesses, who testified God had thus wrought in themselves, giving them, in a moment, such a faith in the blood of His Son as translated them out of darkness into light, out of sin and fear into holiness and happiness. Here," writes Wesley, "ended my disputing. I could now only cry out, 'Lord, help Thou my unbelief!'"

During all these days of stress and search, of doubt and of yearning, Wesley's zeal in practical work never relaxed. It grew even more urgent. Whatever his own spiritual fortunes, he must warn others of their perils and of their duties. To every one—man or woman, rich or poor, with whom he was for a moment in company—he would speak some word for his Master. The passing traveller on the road, the ostler who took the bridle of his horse, the servant of the house, the chance guest at the table—

to each, in turn, Wesley uttered some brief, solemn, unpreluded word of counsel and always with strange effect.

At one inn, Wesley and his companion were served by a gay young woman, who at first listened to them with utter indifference. When they went away, however, "she fixed her eyes, and neither moved nor said one word, but appeared as much astonished as if she had seen one risen from the dead." And there must have been something to compel astonishment, and even to startle, in these sudden and unconventional challenges of Wesley. His appearance —the thin, clear, intense face, the level, steady eyes, the dress of the clergyman, the brow of the scholar, the accent of the gentleman—all these gave startling power to the unprefaced and sudden appeal, that seemed to break out of eternity, and to have something of the awe of eternity about it.

Charles Wesley had already found the spiritual deliverance he sought. He was just recovering from pleurisy; and when the new-born joy broke into his soul, Wesley records, "his bodily strength returned, also, from that hour." Coleridge regards this as an inversion of cause and effect. All that had happened, he thinks, was that the pleurisy was gone; and Charles Wesley mistook the improvement of his health for a spiritual change. In the misinterpreted physical ferment of that vanished pleurisy, Charles Wesley, according to Coleridge, somehow lived to the end of his days! So simply can a great philosopher explain away spiritual phenomena!

The conversion of Charles Wesley was marked by a curious incident. He was lying ill, sad, and burdened; trembling at the point of a faith he was yet unable to exercise. A devout woman in the house, who assisted in nursing him, was seized with the conviction that she ought to speak some words of comfort to him. But he was a clergyman, and she only a servant. How could she venture on such an impertinence?

She took Mr. Bray, in whose house Charles Wesley was lying, aside, and with a burst of tears told him of the impulse which pressed with overpowering energy upon her, and asked how could she, a poor, weak, sinful creature, undertake to guide a minister?

"Go, in the name of the Lord," said Mr. Bray; "speak your words. Christ will work."

The pair knelt down and prayed together; but after they had parted, the trembling woman knelt down by herself, and prayed afresh. Then, walking with timid feet to the door of the room where Charles Wesley was lying, she said, softly, but clearly, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise! Thou shalt be healed of all thy infirmities!"

Wesley, according to his own version, was composing himself to sleep when these words, coming from unseen lips, fell on his ears. "They struck me," he says, "to the heart. I never heard words uttered with like solemnity. I sighed, and said within myself, 'Oh that Christ would thus speak to me!' I lay musing and trembling."

He made inquiries, and presently the poor maid said, "It was I, a weak, sinful creature, that spoke. But the words were Christ's. He commanded me to say them, and so constrained me that I could not forbear." And those words, spoken by the lips of an ignorant woman, and under that mysterious impulse, brought spiritual deliverance to Charles Wesley!

Meanwhile Wesley was beginning to reflect how ill his teachers had served him. He had sat at the feet of à Kempis, of Jeremy Taylor, and of William Law. He had been the most docile of scholars; he had followed their counsels at all costs; and they had left him bankrupt! À Kempis and Taylor were beyond his reach, but William Law still lived. He was the teacher, indeed, of thousands; and Wesley turned upon him with a sort of fierce challenge, kindled by the sense of wasted years, and the memory of needless sufferings. For two years, he wrote to Law, he had lived by his theology; he had taught it to others. It had been to Wesley himself a hateful yoke, and to those to whom Wesley preached an idle sound. Wesley, by God's mercy, had found, at last, a wiser teacher, who had taught him the true secret of Christianity, "Believe, and thou shalt be saved! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all thy heart, and nothing shall be impossible to thee; strip thyself naked of thine own works and righteousness, and flee to Him."

In that teaching Wesley saw the promise of the fulfilment of all his needs:—

"'Now, sir,' he cries to Law, 'suffer me to ask, How will you answer it to our common Lord that you never gave me this advice? Why did I scarcely ever hear you name the name of Christ; never so as to ground anything upon faith in His blood? If you say you advised other things as preparatory to this, what is this but laying a foundation below the foundation? Is not Christ, then, the First as well as the Last? If you say you advised them because you knew that I had faith already, verily you knew nothing of me; you discerned not my spirit at all.'"

Wesley goes on to say, "I beseech you, sir, by the mercies of God, to consider deeply and impartially whether the true reason of your never pressing this upon me was not this, that you never had it yourself."

Never, perhaps, was a great teacher so suddenly arraigned by his own pupil! Law, in reply, reminds Wesley, that he had other teachers, whom he might, on the same grounds, arraign. "Did you not above two years ago," he says, "give a new translation of Thomas à Kempis? Will you call Thomas to account, and to answer it to God as you did me for not teaching you that doctrine?"

But Law goes on to say he did teach Wesley exactly what Böhler taught him. "You have had a great many conversations with me, and I dare say that you never was with me for half-an-hour without my being large upon that very doctrine, which you make me totally silent and ignorant of." Law was a controversialist as formidable as Wesley himself, and he ended his letter by a very keen thrust:—

"If you had only this faith till some weeks ago, let me advise you not to be too hasty in believing, that because you have changed your language or expressions, you have changed your faith. The head can as easily amuse itself with a living and justifying faith in the blood of Jesus, as with any other notion; and the heart, which you suppose to be a place of security, as being the seat of self-love, is more deceitful than the head."

It is easy to understand Wesley's sudden fierceness with Law, and yet to sympathise with Law's defence. Law had completely failed; his teaching cost Wesley years of

wasted suffering; yet the fault did not lie wholly in the teacher. It is true that in Law's books, and, no doubt, in his personal talks with Wesley, could be found frequent and full expositions of the evangelical way of salvation. But the emphasis lay elsewhere. There was no true perspective in Law's theology. Nor was Wesley, in that softened mood, bred of the consciousness of utter failure, in which Böhler found him, and which explains why Böhler's teaching proved so instantly effective. The secret of Law's failure as a teacher, in a word, lies largely in the spiritual condition of his pupil.

But Wesley was standing on the verge of a new life. Wednesday, May 24, 1738, was for him the great day of deliverance, and he has described it in words that have become historic. For days he had been seeking peace, as Böhler had taught him, "(1) by absolutely renouncing all dependence, in whole or in part, upon my own works or righteousness, on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not from my youth up: (2) by adding to the constant use of all the other means of grace continued prayer for this very thing—justifying, saving faith; a fuller reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in Him as my sole justification, sanctification, and redemption." There still, however, lay on him "a strange indifference, dulness, and coldness, and a constant sense of failure." But the dawn of a new and great experience was near.

All through the memorable day of his conversion it is curious to note how Wesley was eagerly listening as if for some voice calling to him out of the eternal world. He seemed to catch, everywhere, prophetic echoes of some coming message. The very air was full of whispers and omens. When he opened his New Testament at five o'clock in the morning, he tells how his eyes fell on the words, "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that we should be partakers of the divine nature." Just before he left his room Wesley opened the book again, and, as with the force of a personal message, there gleamed on him from the open page the sentence, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." These strange whispers met him and pursued him everywhere. In the anthem in St. Paul's he heard trans-

lated into stormy music the cry of his own heart, "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice; let Thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint." Then, through the chant of the sweet-voiced choir, the thunder of the organ, ran, like a thread of still diviner music, a personal message, a voice whispering to him in reply: "O Israel, trust in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption, and He shall redeem Israel from all his sins!" "In the evening," he says, "I went very unwillingly to the society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans," and across more than two centuries the great German spoke to the great Englishman.

What followed must be told in Wesley's own words.

"About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, 'This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?' Then was I taught that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation; but that, as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth, them according to the counsels of His own will."[1]

The fluctuations in Wesley's gladness during those first moments of deliverance really prove Wesley's kinship with all believing hearts in every age. Human nature is hardly capable of one sustained, unshadowed, perpetual joy. But Southey fastens on this very feature in Wesley's experience and extracts from it an argument against its genuineness. "Here," he says, "is a plain contradiction in terms; an assurance which did not assure him." Coleridge, as happens with amusing frequency, disagrees with both Southey and Wesley.

[1] Journal, May 24, 1738.

"'This assurance,' he says, 'amounted to little more than a strong pulse or throb of sensibility, accompanying the vehement volition of acquiescence, an ardent desire to find the position true and a concurring determination to receive it as truth. That the change took place in a society of persons all highly excited aids and confirms me in this explanation.'"

Coleridge, it will be seen, invents his facts. There was no "excitement" in the little company in which a single voice was audible, reading nothing more exciting than a bit of exposition translated from the German. But though Coleridge distrusts Wesley he contradicts Southey. "Surely," he says, "it is rendering the word 'assurance' too absolutely to affirm its incompatibility with any intrusive suggestion of the memory or the fancy." There is a flash of real insight in those words!

Charles Wesley was not present in that little room at Aldersgate at the supreme moment of his brother's life. He was lying at home sick, and was engaged in prayer. The first impulse of John Wesley and those about him was to carry the news to the younger brother. "Towards ten," writes Charles Wesley, "my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of our friends, and declared, 'I believe.' We sang a hymn with great joy and parted with prayer." The hymn is supposed to be that beginning with the verse:—

> "Where shall my wondering soul begin:
> How shall I all to heaven aspire?
> A slave redeemed from death and sin,
> A brand plucked from eternal fire.
> How shall I equal triumphs raise,
> Or sing my great Deliverer's praise?"

Charles Wesley had just composed that fine hymn in the glow of his own conversion, and it was published a few months later. Its music runs through the whole history of Methodism; the experience it reflects is repeated wherever a human soul with intelligent faith receives Christ.

It is interesting to note the historic relations of Wesley's conversion. The two Reformations—of Germany and of England—touch here. They touched, indeed, at an earlier stage. Who traces the great spiritual movement

under Luther, which transfigured Germany and created Protestantism, must go back beyond Luther to another Lincolnshire parsonage — to Lutterworth, where John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English, and was the centre of the spiritual movement which during the fourteenth century swept over England. The English reformer influenced Germany almost as much as he influenced his native land. John Huss himself made no secret of the debt he owed to Wycliffe, and the Council of Constance, which burnt the body of John Huss, directed Wycliffe's bones to be also burnt. Englishman and Bohemian, in its judgment, represented twin forces, and must be smitten with like penalties. The Moravian Brethren come, through the stormy generations which followed, by direct spiritual descent from Huss; Luther was his spiritual heir. And so, after more than three hundred years, Wycliffe's teaching came back to England in Böhler; it spoke to Wesley from Luther's lips in the little gathering in Aldersgate Street. Great debts are, in this way, sometimes greatly paid.

# CHAPTER VIII

## WHAT HAD HAPPENED

The question may now be asked, What was it really happened in that little room in Aldersgate Street on the night of May 24, 1738? Something did happen: something memorable, something enduring. It changed Wesley's life. It lifted him, at a breath, out of doubt into certainty. It transfigured weakness into power. Nay, it did something more; it changed the course of history! A purely secular witness like Lecky declares the movement which had its starting-point in that little room on that night is historically of greater importance than all the splendid victories by land or sea won under Pitt. But for it there would be no Methodist Church under any sky, and English-speaking Protestantism itself, if it still survived—or if it had not found another Wesley —would be bankrupt of spiritual force.

Now, science requires for such an effect an adequate cause; and some of the causes assigned, though they bear the authority of famous names, are of quite humorous inadequacy. Coleridge, as we have seen, discovers in Charles Wesley's conversion nothing more than a recovery from pleurisy. It represented a fall of temperature in his blood, not the entrance of new spiritual forces into his character. Southey is disposed in the same way to resolve Wesley's spiritual experiences into physical terms. He traces the emotions of that great hour on the night of May 24 to the state of his pulse or of his stomach. But to make John Wesley's stomach, and not his soul, the scene of such wonderful phenomena, the source whence radiate such far-reaching forces, can only be regarded as one of the most surprising feats of unconscious humour on record. The "explanations" of Coleridge and Southey explain nothing; they simply reflect that obstinate reluctance to admit the existence

and validity of spiritual forces which is the last disguise of unbelief.

Wesley's own explanation is that in that little meeting, and at that hour so precisely fixed, he was "converted." And he probably understood what happened a little better than his as yet unborn critics.

But to this view many persons object that Wesley was really converted long before that night. If John Wesley was not a Christian when toiling on his spiritual treadmill at Oxford and in Georgia, then, cries Canon Overton, "God help all those who profess and call themselves Christians!" And multitudes, no doubt, will join in emphatic—and, indeed, in somewhat alarmed—agreement with Canon Overton. Let that great experience be recalled which came to Wesley after reading Bishop Taylor's "Holy Living." "Instantly," he says, "I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts and words and actions, being thoroughly convinced that there was no medium, but that every part of my life, not some part only, must either be a sacrifice to God or myself, that is the devil." Was not that the true turning-point of Wesley's life?

Jeremy Taylor's teaching certainly acted as a precipitating shock to all the longings and convictions of Wesley's spiritual nature. They crystallised at its touch into an unshakable purpose. He did at that moment surrender to the great forces and accept the great duties of religion. And he did this with a decision and completeness rare in human experience. "Instantly," he says, "I resolved!" To Wesley, no half measures, no easy compromises, were at any time possible. Even though his reading of truth was sadly mistaken, his loyalty to it was of heroic fibre. Religion for him was no pleasant anodyne, a premium paid to secure eternal safety, a decorous fringe to the outer garment of his life. It was the chief business of existence. There was in Wesley's religion, too, at every stage, the essential note of passion. He would follow the truth as he saw it at all risks and through all worlds.

Was this not a conversion? Did it not bring him into the household of God's children? Here was certainly that root of all religion, the submitted will. Why, following this rhythm betwixt the human soul and God, did there

not come, in Wesley's case, that eternal music of peace, hushing all discords, which is its product? If he had died then, would he not have been saved?

As to this Wesley himself doubted. He offers conflicting judgments. "I, who went to America to convert others," he says, "was never myself converted to God." But, later, with a wise doubt, he writes: "I am not sure of this." Later still, and with clearer insight, he wrote of himself as having at that time "the faith of a servant, not of a son."

The truth is, Wesley simply did not understand at that stage the Christianity in which he had been nurtured and of which he was a teacher. He had sat at the feet of many instructors and had read many books. He had been a sacerdotalist, an ascetic, a mystic, a legalist, all in turns —nay, all together! And yet, through all these stages, he had persistently misread the true order of the spiritual world. He believed that a changed life was not the fruit of forgiveness, but its cause. Good works, he held, came before forgiveness and constituted the title to it; they did not come after it and represent its effects. He had, in every mood of his soul, that is, missed the great secret of Christianity, lying so near, and level to the intelligence of a child; the secret of a personal salvation, the free gift of God's infinite love through Christ; a salvation received through Christ and by faith; a salvation attested by the Spirit of God and verified in the consciousness.

Wesley himself supplies the evidence that up to this time he had missed this conception of religion. We have his spiritual chronology drawn out by his own hand, in a series of self-judgments, all dated and catalogued, and making a complete map of his religious experience.[1] He gives this by way of preface to his own account of what took place at the room in Aldersgate Street, and he explains what, at each successive stage, had been the foundation of his religion. We may quote these, prefixing to each mood the stage in Wesley's life to which it belonged:—

The Child.—"I was carefully taught that I could only be saved by universal obedience; by keeping all the commandments of God; in the meaning of which I was diligently instructed. And

[1] Journal, May 24, 1738.

those instructions, so far as they respected outward duties and sins, I gladly received and often thought of. But all that was said to me of inward obedience, or holiness, I neither understood nor remembered. So that I was indeed as ignorant of the true meaning of the law as I was of the Gospel of Christ.

THE SCHOOLBOY.—"The next six or seven years were spent at school; where, outward restraints being removed, I was much more negligent than before. . . . However, I still read the Scriptures, and said my prayers morning and evening. *And what I now hoped to be saved by was:* (1) *Not being so bad as other people;* (2) *having still a kindness for religion;* (3) *reading the Bible, going to church, and saying my prayers.*

THE UNIVERSITY STUDENT.—"Being removed to the university for five years, I still said my prayers both in public and private. . . . I cannot well tell what I hoped to be saved by now, when I was continually sinning against that little light I had, *unless by those transient fits of what many divines taught me to call repentance.*

HOLY ORDERS.—"I began to alter the whole form of my conversation. . . . I set apart an hour or two a day for religious retirement. I communicated every week. I watched against all sin, whether in word or deed. I began to aim at and pray for inward holiness. *So that now doing so much, and living so good a life, I doubted not but I was a good Christian.*

THE DISCIPLINE OF WILLIAM LAW.—"Meeting now with Mr. Law's 'Christian Perfection' and 'Serious Call,' although I was much offended at many parts of both, yet they convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height, breadth, and depth of the law of God. . . . I cried to God for help and resolved not to prolong the time of obeying Him as I had never done before. *And by my continued endeavour to keep His whole law, inward and outward, to the utmost of my power, I was persuaded that I should be accepted of Him, and thought I was even then in a state of salvation.*

THE "HOLY CLUB."—"In 1730 I began visiting the prisons, assisting the poor and sick and doing what other good I could by my presence or my little fortune to the bodies and souls of all men. To this end I deprived myself of all superfluities and many that are called the necessaries of life. . . . I carefully used, both in public and private, all the means of grace at all opportunities. I omitted no occasion for doing good. I for that reason suffered evil. And all this I knew to be nothing unless as it was directed towards inward holiness. Accordingly this, the image of God, was what I aimed at in all, by doing His will and not my own. Yet when, after continuing for some years in this course, I apprehended myself to be near death, *I could not find that all this*

*gave me any assurance of acceptance with God. At this I was not a little surprised, not imagining I had been all this time building on the sand nor considering that 'other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid' by God, 'even Christ Jesus.'*

THE MYSTIC.—"Soon after a contemplative man convinced me yet more than I was before convinced that outward works are nothing, being alone; and in several conversations instructed how to pursue inward holiness or a union of the soul with God. But even of his instructions (though I then received them as the words of God) I cannot but now observe: (1) That he spoke so incautiously against trusting in outward works that he discouraged me from doing them at all; (2) that he recommended mental prayer and the like exercises as the most effectual means of purifying the soul and uniting it with God. *Now these were, in truth, as much my own works as visiting the sick or clothing the naked; and the union with God, thus pursued, was as really my own righteousness as any I had before pursued under another name.*

THE MISSIONARY.—"In this refined way of trusting to my own works and my own righteousness I dragged on heavily, finding no comfort or help therein till the time of my leaving England. . . . All the time I was at Savannah I was thus beating the air. Being ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, which, by a living faith in Him, bringeth salvation to 'every one that believeth,' I sought to establish my own righteousness, and so laboured in the fire all my days. . . . Before I had willingly served sin; now it was unwillingly, but still I served it. I fell and rose and fell again. . . . During this whole struggle between nature and grace, which had now continued above ten years, I had many remarkable returns to prayer, especially when I was in trouble. I had many sensible comforts. . . . *But I was still 'under the law,' not 'under grace.'*

THE RETURN TO ENGLAND.—"On my return to England, January 1738, being in imminent danger of death and very uneasy on that account, I was strongly convinced that the cause of that uneasiness was unbelief, and that the gaining of a true, living faith was the 'one thing needful' for me. *But still I fixed not this faith on its right object; I meant only faith in God, not faith in or through Christ. I knew not that I was wholly void of this faith, but only thought I had enough of it.*"

That long self-analysis is clear, sustained, and final. As a matter of intellectual knowledge, Wesley, it is needless to say, was familiar with the true sense of Christianity. His Moravian teacher's theology was, and is, in the

Thirty-nine Articles. But for Wesley, as for his generation, these had become a set of pale and colourless syllables out of which all reality had drained. And his experience proves afresh that a creed may survive as a bit of literature; it may be chanted in hymns, and woven into prayers and solemnly taught as a theology, and yet be exhausted of all life. The great phrases may be depolarised, not to say dead.

And this is a warning for all time. Wesley's Church holds to-day, and holds tenaciously, the doctrines which, up to this stage, Wesley himself had missed. These, indeed, are for us weighted by the history they have shaped. They are authenticated by the literature and the hymnology they have inspired. They have so completely passed out of controversy that they have become platitudes. The peril is they may become unverified formulæ again.

Wesley declares that he owed his conversion to the teaching of Peter Böhler. What, then, exactly was that teaching? Böhler did unconsciously the supreme work of his life during those few days in London and at Oxford when he was conversing with Wesley. The humble-minded Moravian, wise only in spiritual science, touches Wesley—and then vanishes! But he helped to change the religious history of England, little as he himself dreamed of it.

And what he taught Wesley is sufficiently clear. In substance, it was three things, things which lie in the very alphabet of Christianity, but which, somehow, the teachings of a godly home, of a great University, of an ancient Church, and of famous books had not taught Wesley. These are that salvation is through Christ's atonement alone and not through our own works; that its sole condition is faith; and that it is attested to the spiritual consciousness by the Holy Spirit. These truths to-day are platitudes; to Wesley they were, at this stage of his life, discoveries.

Wesley's mistake was, of course, fatal. It is perfectly clear that through all the stages of his experience up to this point self, in many disguises, had taken the place of Christ. Wesley always puts the emphasis on himself, on his own motives, acts, self-denials, prayers, aspirations,

and not on his Saviour. And woe to the soul that shifts the centre of its faith in this fashion and finds that centre, not in the redeeming offices, the great and radiant figure of the living Christ, but in the imperfect and broken fragments of its own acts and merits! Not even what the Holy Ghost does in us can at any stage take, as the reason of our confidence before God, the place of what Christ has done for us.

But now, as a result of Böhler's teaching, there broke on Wesley's eyes a true vision of the redeeming work and offices of Jesus Christ. Up to this point he had taken part of those offices on himself—a mistake common in all ages, repeated in myriads of lives, and always most deadly. In the after years of his life his favourite text was that great passage which declares that Christ is "made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." But in the sad years which went before that memorable hour in Aldersgate Street Wesley never had conceived that Christ is made, in some deep and mysterious sense, righteousness to the believing soul. As he himself puts it: "I had faith, but I fixed not this faith on its right object. I meant only faith in God, not faith in and through Christ."

Now not even God's mercy—if that mercy could come to us in some other shape than that presented in the mystery of Christ and His redemption—would satisfy the human conscience. Wesley had, as few men ever had, the sense of sin and its hatefulness: a vision of the divine law—holy, stainless, august—dishonoured by sin. And the sense of the profound and eternal discord betwixt his sinful consciousness and the stainless righteousness of God forbade all peace. To be barely forgiven, spared by divine mercy, was for Wesley not enough, as it cannot be enough for any human soul. There must be some abiding and fundamental reconciliation with righteousness. Here were two eternal contradictories, mercy and justice. And would it be enough to walk through all the paths of eternity spared of God's mercy, but still condemned by His justice?

What the human soul needs is some meeting-point in its own consciousness betwixt those two mighty opposites. And Wesley learned from Böhler the great secret of

Christianity — that in Christ is found that sublime meeting-point. God's gift to the believing soul is not merely pardon, but justification. Christ becomes for that soul "the Lord our righteousness." So the vision which transfigured Wesley's life was that of the complete and all-sufficient offices of Christ in redemption—offices of a grace high beyond our very hopes, and deep beyond our comprehension.

But Böhler taught him, too, the secret of personal and saving faith. Had not Wesley faith before May 24, 1738? Yes, and he himself has told us what kind of a faith it was. It was, he says, "a speculative, notional, airy shadow which lives in the head and not in the heart." The homilies of his own Church, it is true, might have taught Wesley a better definition of faith than this! It is "a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God that by the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven and he is reconciled to the favour of God." Wesley held this definition of faith with perfect intellectual clearness; but it was a mere unrealised abstraction.

Dr. Dale points out that this definition is itself a paradox. "If faith is the condition precedent to salvation, how can it be a belief that we are saved already?" He tries to solve the paradox by asking, "Is it not true that God has already given us—believers and unbelievers alike —eternal redemption in Christ?" Faith does not create a new fact, but only accepts, and brings into the realms of consciousness, a fact which exists already and independently of it.

But that is teaching which easily runs into perilous realms! It may be added that the paradox of faith lies elsewhere. If it is "the gift of God," how can it be itself the condition of other gifts? If faith is the gift of God, the responsibility of its non-existence lies on God! How can it be held for guilt in a man that he does not possess what can only come to him by the gift of God?

The truth, as far as it can be expressed in the terms of human thought, is that faith represents the concurrence of two wills, the Divine and the human. It is impossible without the grace of God; so that grace is an essential, but ever-present, condition of its exercise. But even the grace of God does not produce faith without the consent

of the human will. Wesley learned, but learned late and slowly, that faith is not merely the struggle of the unaided soul to reach some act and mood of confidence. It is the surrender of the soul to the helping grace of God; and only when that surrender is made is the soul uplifted by a divine impulse to the great heights of rejoicing trust.

Wesley learned from Böhler, too, that the pardon received from Christ is attested to the pardoned soul by the direct witness of the Holy Spirit; so it brings, as an immediate fruit, a divine peace. This doctrine, of course, was already embedded in Wesley's creed, and he held it with perfect intellectual clearness. "If we dwell in Christ and Christ in us," he had written to his mother many years before, "certainly we must be conscious of it. If we can never have any certainty that we are in a state of salvation, good reason it is that every moment should be spent, not in joy, but in fear and trembling. Then, undoubtedly, in this life we are of all men most miserable."

And yet, unconsciously, Wesley had hitherto acted on the theory that the only confidence as to his own spiritual state a man can have, is that which he derives from the contemplation of his own good works, or which he extracts, by a strictly logical process, from such good works. He practically held his mother's belief, that any divinely given consciousness of acceptance with God was a rare experience and one confined to great saints. He tells with much simplicity how Peter Böhler "now amazed me more and more by the account he gave of the fruits of faith, of the holiness and happiness that he affirmed to attend it."

Yet, if any doctrine has on it writ large the authority of Scripture and the assent of reason, it is the doctrine of what is technically called "assurance." To deny it is to say that our spiritual consciousness has no office, or that it lies. As a result of forgiveness the most stupendous change has passed over the soul. Its relation to God and to His universe is transfigured. The forgiven sinner is no longer an outcast, but a child. Can we persuade ourselves that this amazing change does not, somehow, report itself to the consciousness? Can it be God's

purpose that the child He has received into His family again should continue to believe, what is now a lie, that he is still an outcast? Though God smiles upon him must he still think that He frowns? After sin's dark substance is gone, can it be God's will that its shadow should remain; that the pardoned soul should carry the burden of sin no longer reckoned against it, and feel the imaginary stains of a guilt that has been washed away? Is it credible that the only soul to whom God's face wears a mask is the soul He has forgiven? And He wears a mask to hide His forgiveness!

Surely this is a paradox of incredible quality! "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." That is a triumphant credo. But who will rejoice in a forgiveness so furtive that not even the soul to which it is granted knows whether or not it has happened?

The denial of the witness of the Spirit involves the most amazing contradiction. The soul before pardon believes, what is true, that it is condemned; but after the great act of pardon it believes, what is a lie, that it is still condemned. And God keeps silence! He sends no sign or whisper of comfort. It is pleasing to Him—the God of truth!—that His restored and forgiven child should still live in the atmosphere of a falsehood! This is an incredibility of transcendent scale! It is in direct contradiction to God's Word: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

This divine witness does not belong to the realm of miracle. It is not independent, as Wesley's experience shows, of human conditions. It varies with the mood of the human heart itself; it wanes with waning faith or grows clearer with deepening earnestness.

It is striking to notice the variations in Wesley's own mood even after this great experience came to him. On the very night of May 24, after he had left the little room in Aldersgate Street, he says, "I was much buffeted with temptations, but cried out and they fled away." They returned again and again. Two days later he describes himself as "in heaviness because of manifold temptations." Still later he finds "a want of joy," and traces its cause to "want of timely prayer." In Wesley's experience, in brief, as in the experience of all Christians,

there are fluctuations of spiritual mood. But his experience now had one new feature. He had still to maintain a daily fight with the forces of evil; but he says, "herein I found the difference between this and my former state. Then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered. Now I was always conqueror!" Here was struggle; but here, too, was victory!

# BOOK III

## THE QUICKENING OF A NATION

# CHAPTER I

## ENGLAND IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

"*Our light looks like the evening of the world:*" in those pathetic and expressive words a "Proposal for a National Reformation of Manners," published in 1694, described the moral condition of England at the beginning of the eighteenth century. A new century was dawning, but it seemed as if in the spiritual sky of England the very light of Christianity itself was being turned, by some strange and evil force, into darkness. And it was upon a moral landscape of this sort, dark with the shadows as of some dreadful and swift-coming spiritual eclipse, that Wesley was about to begin his work. It is impossible to understand the scale and power of that work without some preliminary attempt to realise the field upon which it was done.

It would be easy to multiply testimonies showing how exhausted of living religion, how black with every kind of wickedness, was the England of that day. Its ideals were gross; its sports were brutal; its public life was corrupt; its vice was unashamed. Walpole, indeed, did not invent political corruption, but he systematised it; he erected it into a policy; he made it shameless! Cruelty fermented in the pleasures of the crowd, foulness stained the general speech. Judges swore on the bench; the chaplain cursed the sailors to make them attentive to his sermons; the king swore incessantly, and at the top of his voice. The Duchess of Marlborough, a story runs, called on a lawyer without leaving her name. "I could not make out who she was," said the clerk afterwards, "but she swore so dreadfully she must be a lady of quality."

Ferocious laws still lingered on the Statute-Book. Justice itself was cruel. As late as 1735 men were pressed to death who refused to plead on a capital charge. The law under which women were liable to be

publicly flogged, or to be burned at the stake, was not repealed till 1794. Temple Bar was adorned with a perpetually renewed fresco of human heads. It was the age of the pillory and of the whipping-post; of gin-hells, and of debtors' prisons, hideous enough to have darkened Dante's Inferno with a new gloom. Drunkenness was the familiar and unrebuked habit even of Ministers of the State. Adultery was a sport, and the shame lay not on the false wife or on the smiling gallant, but on the betrayed husband.

But it is unfair to judge any age by its vices. Human wickedness blackens, more or less, every century. Who wants to know how low England had sunk in the eighteenth century must judge of it, not by its worst, but by its best elements—by its religion, or what in it was mistaken for religion; and by the teachers of that religion. For there is no surer test of a religion than the sort of teachers it produces.

It is hardly fair, perhaps, to go to a satirist in search of a portrait; and Thackeray's portraits of eighteenth-century divines are, no doubt, etched in acid. But they are not untrue to life; their power, indeed, lies in their truth. Of George II., the little, hot-tempered, pugnacious monarch, with the morals and manners of a Jonathan Wild in purple, Thackeray writes in sword-edged phrases. And George II. had divines who matched his morals; who even consented to treat his amazing morals as virtues!

The King was dead; and "it was a parson," says Thackeray, "who came and wept over this grave, with Walmoden (one of the dead King's many mistresses) sitting on it, and claimed heaven for the poor old man slumbering below. Here was one who had neither dignity, learning, morals, nor wit—who tainted a great society by a bad example; who in youth, manhood, old age, was gross, low, and sensual; and Mr. Porteus, afterwards my Lord Bishop Porteus, says the earth was not good enough for him, and that his only place was heaven! Bravo, Mr. Porteus! The divine who wept these tears over George the Second's memory wore George the Third's lawn."

Thackeray draws a life-like picture of another divine of that day—the type of a class—Selwyn's chaplain and

parasite, who has written down his own character in his own letters. And Thackeray sets the dreadful portrait in the perspective of history, when

"all the foul pleasures and gambols in which he revelled were played out; all the rouged faces into which he leered were worms and skulls; all the fine gentlemen whose shoebuckles he kissed lay in their coffins. This worthy clergyman takes care to tell us that he does not believe in his religion, though, thank heaven, he is not so great a rogue as a lawyer. He goes on Mr. Selwyn's errands, any errands, and is proud, he says, to be that gentleman's proveditor. He waits upon the Duke of Queensberry—'old Q'—and exchanges pretty stories with that aristocrat. He comes home 'after a hard day's christening,' as he says, and writes to his patron before sitting down to whist and partridges for supper. He revels in the thoughts of oxcheek and burgundy—he is a boisterous, uproarious parasite, licks his master's shoes with explosions of laughter, and cunning smack and gusto, and likes the taste of that blacking as much as the best claret in old Q.'s cellar. He has 'Rabelais' and 'Horace' at his greasy fingers' ends. He is inexpressibly mean—curiously jolly; kindly and good-natured in secret—a tender-hearted knave, not a venomous lickspittle. Jesse says that at his chapel in Long Acre, 'he attained a considerable popularity by the pleasing, manly, and eloquent style of his delivery.'"

"Was infidelity endemic, and corruption in the air?" asks Thackeray, as he contemplates such amazing divines. The bad morals of George II., he goes on to say, bore their fruit in the early years of George III., and the result was a court and a society as dissolute as England ever knew. Thackeray was a satirist, but these pictures owe nothing to the gall in his inkpot. The satire, we repeat, lies in their truth.

Now, a religion has always the sort of clergy it deserves; and, taken as a class, the clergy of the eighteenth century were gross and unspiritual because they represented a faith exhausted of all spiritual force. If, in the England of that day, we look behind all mere failures in external morality to the spiritual causes which account for them, these are clear. It was the age of a shallow and confident Deism; a Deism exultant and militant, served by wit and humour as well as defended by logic. It had captured literature; it coloured the general imagi-

nation; it stained the common speech; it sat enthroned in the place of Christian faith.

Now Deism of any type is morally impotent; and Deism of the eighteenth-century type is nothing but a little patch of uncertain quicksand set in a black sea of atheism. It does not deny God's existence, but it cancels Him out as a force in human life. It breaks the golden ladder of revelation betwixt heaven and earth. It leaves the Bible discredited, duty a guess, heaven a freak of the uncharted imagination, and God a vague and far-off shadow. Men were left by it to climb into a shadowy heaven on some frail ladder of human logic. And while in those sad days there was this obscuring mist of Deism outside the Churches, inside them there was a mist almost as evil and dense. Open and confessed Arianism had captured almost completely the dissenting Churches; and an unconscious and practical Arianism reigned, in spite of its Articles, in the Anglican Church. The sense of sin was faint; and with it had grown faint, too, the doctrine of a divine and redeeming Christ.

The religious literature of that age shows how curiously pale and ineffective the notion of God had become for even those who professed to be His ministers. In the theology of the time "God," says Sir Leslie Stephen, "was an idol compounded of fragments of tradition and of frozen metaphysics." [1] There *was* a God; and He had once touched human life. But it was a long time ago, and in a far-off land. He had now emigrated from His own world. The grotesque Deity of Bishop Warburton was, to quote Leslie Stephen again, "a supernatural chief-justice whose sentences were carried out in a non-natural world; a constitutional monarch who had signed a constitutional compact and retired from the active government of affairs." Of God as the Father of our spirits, as actually living in His own universe and ruling men's lives; God of whom it might be said in Tennyson's words:

"Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet,"

no trace is to be found in the theology of the eighteenth century. Superstition, according to its theologians, con-

[1] "History of English Thought," &c., vol. ii. p. 338.

sisted in the belief that God ever revealed Himself in the affairs of the modern world. Fanaticism was the imagination that He revealed Himself by any touch, or breath, or thrill of influence to the personal soul.

Deism, we repeat, thick with Arctic fogs and frozen with Arctic chills, constitutes the working theology of that unhappy age. In that theology Christ is attenuated to a shadow. He serves as a label for a creed, but He has only the offices of a label. His Gospel did not consist of "good news," but only of good advice. It was not a deliverance, but a philosophy. A decent Chinaman who took Confucius seriously might almost have preached nine-tenths of the sermons of that period. If he had concealed his pig-tail, altered his complexion, disguised himself in cassock and bands, learned a few technical phrases, and spoken of the Gospels as true but very remote histories, he might have passed for a sound divine, with a very orthodox appetite for a fat benefice. Lecky says, with cruel accuracy, "Beyond a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity and a general acknowledgment of the veracity of the Gospel narratives, the divines of that day taught little which might not have been taught by the disciples of Socrates or the followers of Confucius."

Now Christianity does not consist in a code of ethics. It is not a chapter of remote history. It is a group of great and majestic truths; truths which transcend the understanding, and are robed in mystery; but which must shape our lives. First and last it is a message of redeeming love. The mystery of a divine propitiation through the blood of Christ, of access to God through the priestly offices of Christ, is of its very essence. Its supreme gift is the life of God restored in the soul by the mighty grace of the Holy Spirit.

But all these great doctrines, which do not so much belong to Christianity as constitute it, had somehow slipped, not merely from human faith, but almost from human recollection at this stage of English-speaking Christianity. The message of "entrance into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus" had no meaning for men who believed they could saunter into God's presence with a few polite compliments at any time. In the religion of that day there were no tears of repentance. The note

of passion is silent; the hush of reverence is missing. And all this because the vision of God had grown faint: the sense of sin—of what sin means, and of God's remedy for it—had perished.

Now a religion exhausted of its supernatural contents in this fashion has no power over the human conscience. It transfigures no lives. It inspires no martyrs. It creates no saints. It sends out no missionaries. It generates a morality of ignoble temper. It resembles nothing so much as an atmosphere exhausted of oxygen.

And the religion of the eighteenth century was treated as it deserved to be treated. Its very sacraments, "the symbols of atoning grace," became, in Cowper's phrase,

> "An office key, a pick-lock to a place."

Swift, in one of his letters to Stella, writes: "I was early in to see the Secretary, Bolingbroke, but he was gone to his devotions and to receive the Sacrament; several rakes did the same. It was not for piety, but for employment, according to Act of Parliament." Such a religion could not inspire a saintly or an heroic ministry; and certainly there was not much that was saintly, and still less that was heroic, in the temper of the Anglican clergy in the days of the early Georges. The first great duty of religion was to be tepid. There must be no enthusiasm, no heroics. Extremes were to be shunned. "We should take care never to overshoot ourselves, even in the pursuits of virtues," was the counsel of one of the preachers of that age. "Whether zeal or moderation be the point we aim at, let us keep fire out of one and frost out of the other." "Those words," says Miss Wedgwood, "are the motto of the Church of the eighteenth century." Its divines were much more afraid of being suspected of believing too much, than of doubting everything.

Christianity was diligently watered down, by its own teachers, into insipid platitudes. The sin against the Holy Spirit is by Bishop Clarke diluted into "a perverse refusal to be convinced by the highest evidence of the truth of Christianity." The motive by which religion was urged on the conscience was at bottom an

appeal to cowardice. Bishop Sherlock, indeed, resolves religion into a judicious balance of odds. "It is ten to one," he says, in substance, "that religion is true. If it turns out to be false the Christian has only lost one-tenth of the amount he staked. If it turns out to be true, the sinner has made a very bad bargain indeed." Logic is the one instrument of a tepid religion. So all the teaching and preaching of the eighteenth-century divines is in the terms of logic, and has the chill of logic. The religious teachers of that day, in a word, had but half-beliefs, and out of half-beliefs no heroic morality can be extracted.

Leslie Stephen says of the most famous preacher of that day, Blair, that "he was a mere washed-out dealer of second-hand commonplaces, who gives the impression that the real man has vanished and left nothing but a wig and gown." Bishop Warburton's conception of the Christian Church may be gathered from a sentence in one of his letters. "The Church," he says, "like the ark of Noah, is worth saving, not for the sake of the unclean beasts that almost fill it and make most noise and clamour in it; but for the little corner of rationality that is much more depressed by the stink within than by the tempest without." Middleton, another Church dignitary of that day, wrote a letter to Lord Hervey ridiculing the Articles which he was about to sign in order to take possession of a living.

"Though there are many things in the Church (he says) that I wholly dislike, yet while I am content to acquiesce in the ill I shall be glad to taste a little of the good, and so have some amends for that ugly assent and consent which no man of sense will approve of. We read of some of the earliest disciples of Christ who followed Him, not for His works, but for His loaves. To us who had not the happiness to see the one it may be allowed to have some inclination to the other. Your lordship knows a certain person who, with a very low notion of the Church's sacred bread, has a very high relish for a very large share of the temporal. My appetite for each is equally moderate. I have no pretensions to riot in the feast of the elect, but with the sinner in the Gospel to gather up the crumbs that fall from the table."

Now a religion of this type, and served by such ministers, inevitably bred ignoble lives. Piety was but

a skin of external habits, a form of prudence extended into the spiritual world. If the dusty sermons of that age are put into the retort and their essence distilled, it will be seen to consist of exhortations like these: "Don't be drunk, or you will ruin your health; nor commit murder, or you shall be hanged. Every man should be happy, and the way to be happy is to be thoroughly respectable."

The opinion that Christianity was untrue, but useful to society, represents the working creed of the educated classes. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu reports a plan on foot for taking the "not" out of the Commandments and putting it in the Creed. That is a flash of feminine satire; but it represents the theory on which whole multitudes lived.

Bishop Butler has painted the spirit of his time in dark and imperishable colours. "The deplorable distinction of our age," he says, "is an avowed scorn of religion, and a growing disregard of it." But Butler himself, with all his high gifts, supplies, in his own person, an expressive proof of the spiritual blindness and death which lay on the Churches of that day. He forbade Whitefield and the Wesleys to preach in his diocese, though all around his cathedral city lay the most degraded and hopeless class in England—the coal-miners of Kingswood, as untouched by any of the forces of Christianity as if they had been savages in Central Africa. That the best, the wisest, the most powerful, the most earnestly convinced of the bishops of that day should take this attitude towards Wesley and his work shows what was the general temper of the clergy of that time. Butler's conscience was not disquieted by the lapse into mere heathenism of a whole class within sound of the bells of his cathedral; but he grows piously indignant at the spectacle of an ecclesiastical irregularity! Enthusiasm in good men was, in his eyes, a more alarming spectacle than vice in bad men. What more significant inversion of spiritual values can be imagined!

No feature of the eighteenth century, indeed, is more curious, or more deeply characteristic, than its dread of "enthusiasm." It was the accursed thing! A sound divine was much more anxious to purge himself of the suspicion of enthusiasm, than of the scandal of heresy.

It was an age of compromise; of compromises in politics, in philosophy, in theology; and compromises are fatal to enthusiasm. They must kill it, or be killed by it.

Let it be remembered that two great waves of passion had recently swept over England—the Puritan wave that culminated and broke in the Civil War; and the recoil from Puritanism which found its triumph in the Restoration. Great debates, fought with sword and musket, with the prison and the pillory, with Acts of Parliament and sentences of the courts, had left England exhausted. The Whig spirit of compromise which explains the Revolution of 1688 had captured the realm of religion. Men were still sore with the wounds of the strife. The public mind was in a mood of reflux. It dreaded passion. It hated fanatics. Enthusiasm was a word suspect. Moderation was the chief thing.

Now enthusiasm has, or ought to have, its last stronghold in religion, and in the men who are the teachers of religion. But in the eighteenth century the clergy were the one class in the whole nation in which the fires of enthusiasm were most completely extinct; and this as a result of their own acts. Within a single generation they had, first, taught the divine right of kings, and fiercely persecuted all who doubted that doctrine. Then, after 1688, they swallowed their principles, took the oath of allegiance to William, and proceeded to hunt out of rectory and parsonage the stubborn remnant of their own brethren who declined to turn their back on their principles with the same cheerful facility! Principle of the high and austere sort was, for the moment, discredited in this dreadful fashion by the example set by the clergy themselves.

There were some bright spots, it is true, even in this dark landscape. Amongst the fat, well-beneficed, unspiritual bishops of that day stand the almost saintly figures of Butler and of Berkeley. The century which counted William Law amongst its theologians, and Watts and Doddridge amongst its singers, still had some of the divine glow of religion in its veins. And there must have been many an English rectory, beside Epworth Parsonage, in which burned the clear flame of household piety.

And yet the spiritual life of England at this moment

was beyond all doubt swiftly draining away. Its public life corrupt; its clergy discredited; its Church frozen; its theology exhausted of Christian elements. This was the England of the eighteenth century! It needed a spiritual revolution to save such a people. The airs of Pentecost must blow afresh over the dying land; the fires of a new Pentecost must fall to kindle the flame of faith in men's souls once more. And Wesley was called, and trained by God, for that great task.

# CHAPTER II

## BEGINNING THE WORK

WESLEY'S conversion perplexed some of his friends and alarmed others. "If you were not a Christian ever since I knew you," said Mrs. Hutton, the mother of his friend, "you were a great hypocrite, for you made us all believe you were one." Samuel Wesley received the news with a sort of bewildered anger which is almost amusing. His brother, he held, was suffering from an attack of "enthusiasm"—a disease much more deadly than any known to medical science. "Falling into enthusiasm," he writes, "is being lost with a witness. I pleased myself with the expectation of seeing Jack, but now that is over, and I am afraid of it. I heartily pray God to stop the progress of this lunacy. . . . What Jack means by his not being a Christian till last month I understand not," cries this bewildered High Churchman. "Is baptism nothing? . . . He must be either unbaptized or an apostate to make his words true."

But then John Wesley had already moved to another spiritual climate. In his spiritual chronology the birthday of a Christian was now shifted from his baptism to his conversion; and "in that change," as Miss Wedgwood says, with a flash of profound insight, "the partition line of two great systems is crossed."

Wesley, however, was the last man to be moved by the alarms and perplexities of his friends. Already, on June 13—only three weeks after his conversion—he was on his way to Germany to visit the Moravian settlements. He loved to study religion in the concrete, to try it by the supreme test of life. The actual experience of the human soul was for him the final logic. In the Moravian settlements at Herrnhut he would find a whole community living by the great truths he had just learned, and he hastened to cross-examine the experiences of

these simple-minded Moravians; to study the social order they had evolved and the manner of life they lived.

He spent three months in this business, returning to England on September 16, and his Journal gives a picture, half amusing and half pathetic, of Wesley's conversations with group after group of these godly peasants, and the anxious yet simple-minded questions by which he interrogated their beliefs and emotions. In the rough guttural of peasant's German, or filtered through a Latin translation, the experiences of one devout Moravian after another reached Wesley, and he listened with musing brow and patient eyes. Here was the work of the Holy Spirit translated into terms of human life and spread out before his eyes. Here was Christ's Gospel verified! Wesley wrote to his brother Samuel, "I am with a Church whose conversation is in heaven, in whom is the mind that was in Christ, and who walk as He walked. Oh, how high and holy a thing Christianity is, and how widely distinct from that—I know not what—which is so called, though it neither purifies the heart nor renews the life."

Wesley met Count Zinzendorf, the head of the Moravian community, a man with a genius for religion and in a hundred ways remarkable; but it is curious to note that Zinzendorf, who in social standing and in education was so much nearer Wesley than Böhler, impressed Wesley much less than did that lowly-minded missionary. There was a narrower spiritual interval betwixt Böhler and Wesley than betwixt Zinzendorf and Wesley; and Wesley was in that mood when social distance does not count.

Wesley took part in the religious services of the Moravians with keenest sympathy, and sat, with the simplicity of a child, at the feet of peasant-elder or carpenter-preacher in turn. But he could not part with his obstinate English common-sense, and he studied the whole system and the type of piety it produced with shrewd eyes. On his return to England he wrote to Count Zinzendorf a grateful letter, full of the praise of what he had seen; but, he added, he hoped later to give his Moravian friends "the fruit of my love by speaking freely on a few things which I did not approve, perhaps because I did not understand them."

What those "few things" were of which Wesley's keen common-sense disapproved is described later, and at length. But on the whole Wesley came back from his Moravian tour with faith reinforced. His new spiritual experiences were really not new. They belonged to a line of human experience which ran back through all the saints to the days of the Apostles. He had seen them shared by hundreds of living men and women, in whom they bore all their ancient fruits of saintship. Wesley brought back from Herrnhut the exultant sense that he stood in a goodly companionship.

From this moment the character of Wesley's work changes. He is living in a new spiritual climate. Religion is for him no longer an experiment. It is an attainment! It belongs to the realm of certainties. He has an exultant confidence in proclaiming it, and his work gains instantly a new and strangely concentrated energy.

The story of his first week's work is a striking expression of zeal. He reached London on Saturday night, September 16, preached four times on Sunday, met the little Moravian society, which now numbered thirty-two persons, on Monday; on Tuesday he visited the condemned felons at Newgate and preached in the evening at Aldersgate Street. All the days of the week were, in fact, filled up with preaching and private visitations. And at last Wesley has somehow found the key to the human heart. His speech had always possessed strange power to disquiet the conscience, but now there is a new quality in his message. It brings peace to those consciences it formerly could only disquiet.

His Journal is rich with brief and sometimes apparently unconscious records of success, both in preaching to great congregations and in dealing with individuals. "One who had long scoffed at spiritual religion" sent an urgent message to Wesley to visit him. "He had all the signs," says Wesley, "of settled despair, both in his countenance and behaviour. He said he had been enslaved to sin many years, especially to drunkenness. . . . I desired that we might join in prayer. After a short space he rose, and his countenance was no longer sad; he said, 'Now I know God loveth me, and hath forgiven

my sins, and sin shall not have dominion over me, for Christ hath set me free.'" "And," says Wesley, "according to his faith it was unto him."

He records again: "At St. Thomas's, a young woman raving mad, screaming and tormenting herself continually; I had a strong desire to speak to her. The moment I began she was still. The tears ran down her cheeks all the time I was telling her 'Jesus of Nazareth is able and willing to deliver you.' . . . I expounded at Mr. Fox's, as usual, the great power of God with us, and one who had been in despair several years received the witness that she was a child of God." Such records as these begin to shine like stars in the hitherto clouded and troubled firmament of Wesley's Journal.

Wesley, it is clear, now stands fitly equipped on the threshold of the true work of his life — the religious awakening of his countrymen. His spiritual training, in a sense, is complete. He has a real Gospel to preach; the good tidings of religion as a deliverance, not as a new and intolerable bondage. And he can proclaim this Gospel with a new accent of certainty. It is verified in his own experience, and confirmed by the witness of multitudes. He has all his old thoroughness, his utter sincerity, his scorn of compromise, his unsparing self-sacrifice; but through these fine qualities there now runs something new—a note of victory, a fire of gladness.

Here, surely, is a fit instrument in God's hands for a great task. It is not merely that Wesley's spirit is now a transparent medium through which truth shines clear to other spirits. It is a channel through which great forces—the living energies of the Holy Spirit—stream into other lives. Wesley, under these new conditions, resembles an electric wire thrilling with subtle and strange energy. He has power! Power other than that of the eloquent tongue or the logical brain; power that runs back to eternity, that belongs to the spiritual order, and gives him a strange mastery over the souls of those who listen to him.

But Wesley's preaching, if it produced more direct and visible results than before, now provoked, curiously enough, almost more of active opposition than ever. His

disquieting earnestness, the steel-like edge and hardness of his speech, had always been too severe a trial for the drowsy congregations of that day. For them religion had only the offices of an opiate; it was a process as entirely mechanical as the revolutions of a Thibetan prayer-wheel. But now the disturbing energy of Wesley's speech for hearers who asked only to be let alone was somehow enormously multiplied; and the Churches, one after another, shut promptly and almost automatically against him, after he had once preached in them. Before the end of 1738 he was little better than an ecclesiastical outcast.

His Journal at this period is full of such records as these: "Preached twice at St. John's, Clerkenwell, so that I fear they will bear me there no longer. . . . Preached in the evening to such congregations as I never saw before at St. Clement's, in the Strand; as this is the first time of my preaching here, I suppose it will be the last. . . . I preached at St. Giles's. . . . How was the power of God present with us! I am content to preach here no more."

We do not stop just now to analyse the secret of the opposition Wesley aroused at this stage amongst the clergy and the average churchgoers. It is sufficient to note the fact that at this precise moment, when he really had a message he could proclaim with exultant confidence—a message through whose syllables some strange spiritual force ran like a flame—well-nigh all the church-doors in London were shut with a loud and energetic bang against him!

As the Churches refused to hear him, Wesley betook himself to the gaols, and he found his most eager hearers, and his best results, amongst the felons in the condemned cells. Felons waiting to be hanged, it must be remembered, sat in crowds—a witness to the cruelty of the law in those harsh days—in every English gaol. Charles Wesley records preaching to one sad company of the condemned, fifty-two in number, and amongst them a child of ten. Rogers, the poet, as late as 1780, relates seeing a cart full of young girls, in dresses of various colours—the feminine instinct for adornment surviving to the last—on their way to Tyburn to be executed, after the Gordon Riots. Wesley's work amongst these hurrying candidates

for the gallows fills a large space in his Journal. Here is a typical story—one of many:—

"On Wednesday my brother and I went, at their desire, to do the last good office to the condemned malefactors. . . . It was the most glorious instance I ever saw of faith triumphing over sin and death. On observing the tears run fast down the cheeks of one of them, I asked him, 'How do you feel your heart now?' He calmly replied, 'I feel a peace which I could not have believed to be possible, and I know it is the peace of God which passeth all understanding.'"

In his Journal it is almost amusing to note the rigour with which Wesley still continues to test himself, and the care, not to say the eagerness, with which he collects and records all varieties of spiritual experience which he sees. He writes to many persons who have come under his influence, asking them to describe the effects religion produces in them; and Wesley, himself the frankest of men, had some secret charm which awakened frankness in others. As a result, his Journal is packed with human documents which, when read even a hundred and fifty years afterwards, affect the reader with a curious sense of reality and honesty.

It was no vulgar and peeping curiosity which made Wesley seek and write down these stories. The truth is that no one ever looked at religion in a more scientific way, or tried it more absolutely by scientific methods, than did Wesley. For him it was not a theology to be recited, a history to be learned, a philosophy to be interpreted, or even a code of external ethics to be obeyed; it was a divine force entering human life, and undertaking to produce certain results in human character and experience. And Wesley was always testing it, in himself or in others, by the question, "Does it, as a matter of fact, produce the results it claims to yield?"

"Experience first, inference second. This," says Huxley, "is the order of science." And Wesley's attitude towards his own work is, in Huxley's sense, completely scientific. He resembles a chemist who is trying some new combination. He must watch, note, verify the results, in terms of human experience, which this combination produces.

Meanwhile, the three men who were to be henceforth

linked in a memorable partnership of Christian service found themselves together in London. Wesley landed from Germany on September 16, 1738; Whitefield returned from a brief visit to America in December; Charles Wesley was acting as curate at Islington. Thus, at the beginning of 1739, the three comrades, for the first time since the Holy Club at Oxford broke up, found themselves side by side again. They were young men with no ecclesiastical position, and no sense as yet of the great career they were to pursue in common. But all three had, somehow, relearned the lost secret of Christianity. Something of its early power had fallen upon them. A gleam of the fiery tongues of Pentecost was in their speech; a breath of its mighty rushing wind was in their lives.

The evidence of that strange power is found abundantly in each of the three. Charles Wesley, during his brother's absence in Germany, did amazing work in the condemned cells of the prisons, and amongst the social wrecks of the workhouses of London. Crowds gathered round Whitefield whenever he stepped into a pulpit. In the little societies already in existence the presence of the three was a sort of embodied flame, and remarkable meetings were held. Sometimes whole nights were spent in prayer.

"On the first night of 1739," says Wesley himself, "Mr. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutchins, and my brother Charles, were present at our love-feast, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily amongst us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty, we broke out with one voice, 'We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord!'"

Such meetings, of course, shocked the drowsy sense of propriety in the average clergyman. The preaching of the three comrades might incidentally yield results of a praiseworthy sort. It had to be confessed that they made thieves honest, drunkards sober, wife-beaters gentle. They lit human faces with the glow of a strange

joy, and sent even condemned men to the gallows with hymns on their lips. But their work had one fatal vice, the worst that age knew—it was irregular! It was tainted with that dreaded, hated, and most dangerous thing, enthusiasm! Even Southey, telling the story a hundred years afterwards, cannot quite forgive the Wesleys for saving men and women in an unconventional fashion; and Coleridge breaks upon his text with one of his amusing footnotes:—

"O dear and honoured Southey! this is the favourite of my library among many favourites; this is the book which I can read for the twentieth time with delight, when I can read nothing else at all. . . . This darling book is nevertheless an unsafe book for all of unsettled minds. The same facts and incidents as those recorded in Scripture, and told in the same words—and the workers, alas! in the next page—these are 'enthusiasts,' 'fanatics.'"

The incidents of the first chapters in the Acts of the Apostles re-emerging in actual life after eighteen centuries—this was, indeed, for many good people an alarming, not to say a shocking, spectacle. How many there are still who can tolerate spiritual phenomena only as long as they are safely locked up between the covers of the Bible, and at a distance of centuries!

The two Wesleys, who had no disquieting dream of separation from the Church, and were anxious for nothing more than the approval of their spiritual superiors, waited on the Bishop of London to explain and justify their methods. Gibson was a diplomatist, an antiquarian, a man of affairs; but anything more remote than his temper from the fiery zeal of the reformer, the consuming ardour of the evangelist, can hardly be imagined. He looked with perplexed eyes at the two brothers. The brown of American suns was as yet upon their faces; but they were scholars, gentlemen, university men. The pity was that some strange fire of zeal burned fiercely in them. There was no touch of the dissenter about them. They had no quarrel with the Articles or the ritual of the Church. The disquieting thing was that they took these too literally.

They discussed with their Bishop, for example, the

propriety, nay, the necessity, of re-baptizing Dissenters. "Sure and unsure," Charles Wesley argued, "were not the same"; and where the fate of eternal souls was at stake no risks ought to be taken. But Bishop Gibson was anxious only to leave the Dissenters alone, no matter how inconsistent with the High Church theory that policy might be. Charles Wesley waited upon Gibson later to notify that he intended to perform such a baptism.

"'It is irregular,' said the Bishop; 'I never receive any such information but from the minister.'

"'My lord, the Rubric does not so much as require the minister to give you notice, but "any discreet person." I have the minister's leave.'

"'Who gave you authority to baptize?'

"'Your lordship,' replied Charles (for he had been ordained priest by him), 'and I shall exercise it in any part of the known world.'

"'Are you a licensed curate?' said the Bishop. 'Do you not know that no man can exercise parochial duty in London without my leave? It is only *sub silentio*.'

"'But you know many do take that permission for authority, and you yourself allow it.'

"'It is one thing to connive,' said the Bishop, 'and another to approve. I have power to inhibit you.'

"'Does your lordship exert that power?' asked Charles, all the Wesley in him hardening into stubbornness at a threat. 'Do you now inhibit me?'

"'Oh, why will you push matters to an extreme?' cried the perplexed Bishop."

Plainly troublesome young men these, who refused to dilute religion into platitudes, or button it up in polite conventions!

Of the three comrades, the Wesleys—perhaps because they were older and better known—were regarded with more suspicion. All official brows frowned upon them. Their opportunities of preaching steadily narrowed. The Church at best was a hard stepmother to the brothers. John Wesley was his father's curate for three years, the sole ecclesiastical charge, in England, he ever held. Charles held, without a title, a curacy at Islington for about as many months, and was driven from it practically by violence.

This was the only preferment the Anglican Church had to offer two of its sons who represented the greatest religious force that has stirred in Protestant England.

It is usual to say that the startling physical manifestations which attended the early preaching of the Wesleys explain, and justify, the general shutting of all pulpits against them; but the mere dates in the almanac wreck that theory. In the spring of 1739 only one instance of the physical manifestations, afterwards so remarkable a result of Wesley's preaching, had occurred, and already the Church had closed her doors upon her enthusiastic son for ever. Southey finds justification for the exclusion of the Wesleys in the love-feasts and watch-night services held by the little Moravian societies, in which the Wesleys joined. We have described one such meeting which lasted till three o'clock in the morning, and was swept by a wave of remarkable spiritual influence. "Such a meeting," said Southey, "set prudence at defiance. It was an example of that excessive devotion which gave just offence to the better part of the clergy. Such excessive devotion," he adds, "if it find a mind sane, is not likely to leave it so." Coleridge, with a flash of keener insight, traces the opposition of the clergy to the new movement to what he calls "the subtle poison of the easy-chair."

To such a spiritual mood "prudence" seems the first of virtues, and zeal the last and worst of offences. The Wesleys disquieted the conscience of the clergy of their day by their uncomfortable earnestness. They were "enthusiasts." This was but a polite way of saying they were dangerous lunatics. So in mere self-defence there was an unconscious conspiracy to suppress them. But it remains, after all explanations, the scandal of the Church of that day, the final and overwhelming proof of its blindness, that it shut its doors against the Wesleys.

But Whitefield was the youngest of the group; he had as yet provoked less criticism than his comrades. His matchless preaching powers gave him a strange popularity; and so, in the order of God's providence, it fell to him to break through the narrow limits of mechanical Church order and make a way for the new forces beginning to stir in the religious life of England.

There is something almost amusing in the slowly awakening suspicion of the London clergy towards Whitefield. Here was a strange clerical phenomenon, a preacher who used words of fire in the pulpit; who wept over his hearers in a passion of pity, and somehow set their tears running too. It was plain that no starched conventionalities would long restrain a divine at once so youthful and so ardent. No one knew quite what he would do next. He was preaching in Bermondsey Church to a great crowd, while a still vaster crowd filled the churchyard outside, unable to find admittance. Why, asked Whitefield, should he not go out, turn a tombstone into a pulpit and preach to that great multitude eagerly waiting to listen? The spectacle of that dumb waiting crowd in Bermondsey churchyard, he said afterwards, "put me first upon thinking of preaching without doors. I mentioned it to some friends, who looked upon it as a mad notion. However, we knelt down and prayed that nothing may be done rashly."

At St. Margaret's, Westminster, one Sunday morning Whitefield was practically pushed into the pulpit, and preached against the protest of the officials, and to the scandal of all ecclesiastical sensibilities. A few days later he went to Bristol, but by this time the clergy generally had taken alarm. The chancellor of the diocese sent for him, and asked him by what authority he preached in the diocese of Bristol without a licence, and read to him those canons which forbade any minister from preaching in a private house. Whitefield contended these did not apply to ministers of the Church of England. When he was informed of his mistake, he said:—

"There is also a canon, sir, forbidding all clergymen to frequent taverns and play at cards; why is not that put in execution?" Then he added what, to the shuddering chancellor, seemed the worst of blasphemies. There were things—the souls of men, for example—which this highly irregular young curate counted of more value than even the most venerable canons. At all risks he must preach to lost men wherever he found them. "Notwithstanding the canons," he said, "he could not but speak the things which he knew."

The answer was solemnly written down, and the chan-

cellor then said grimly: "I am resolved, sir, if you preach or expound anywhere in this diocese, I will first suspend, and then excommunicate, you." They parted at this point; and Whitefield goes on to tell how "after I had joined in prayer for the chancellor," he conducted a service in St. Nicholas Street with signal power. "It is remarkable," he adds, "that we have not had such a continued presence of God amongst us as since I was threatened to be excommunicated."

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIELD-PREACHING

Now an attempt to put an ecclesiastical muzzle on Whitefield was predoomed to failure. Whitefield, it is true, was only twenty-five years of age, a newly-ordained curate, without a charge and without influence. The chancellor of a diocese, with frowning official brows and the threat of excommunication on his lips, was a figure of sufficiently awe-inspiring quality. The ordinary curate would have been extinguished by the vision! But Whitefield was a curate of quite unconventional qualities. A spirit so daring as his was not to be chilled by the frown of even episcopal brows; a zeal so flame-like could not be restrained by even the menace of lawn sleeves! At that precise moment, too, Whitefield found himself in the presence of what seemed an urgent and overwhelming call to preach. Here were the Kingswood miners, a community ignorant, vicious, forgotten, who, beyond all others, needed the care and teaching of the Christian Church, and yet were left completely outside, not merely of its agencies, but even of its very remembrance. When Whitefield was setting out for America some wise and keen-sighted friend said to him, "If you have a mind to convert Indians, there are colliers enough in Kingswood." How could one of Christ's ministers—one, too, of Whitefield's gifts and temperament, with the consciousness both of a divine message and of a divine power to utter that message—stand before such a crowd and consent to be dumb? The silent, sunless faces were a call too urgent to be denied.

The churches could find no room for Whitefield, and on Saturday afternoon, February 17, 1739, he took his stand on a little rising ground outside Bristol, called Rose-green, and preached his first open-air sermon. There was a congregation of only some two hundred staring,

open-mouthed listeners. Here was a strange spectacle, a clergyman in bands and gown, with a voice that had in it a note of thunder, preaching a sermon at the roadside. "I thought," says Whitefield, in his magnificent way, "I might be doing the service of my Creator, who had a mountain for His pulpit and the heavens for a sounding-board."

It was just five months since John Wesley landed on his return from Germany. They had been months of waiting, of uncertainty, of discouragement, of apparently narrowing opportunities for work. The doors of all the churches were being shut one after another against Wesley and his comrades. It seemed as if England had no place for them, and could offer them no career. Those five months constitute a dramatic pause on the threshold of a great work. Then Whitefield, first of the three immortal comrades, broke through the imprisoning lines of conventional usage and of ecclesiastical law, and preached in the open air. With that act he stepped into a freer, larger world, and from that moment the new spiritual forces beginning to stir in England found—or rather made for themselves—a free channel.

The open-air services begun by Whitefield were attended, almost instantly, with startling results. His first audience numbered 200, the second rose to 3000, the third to 5000, and the crowds swiftly extended to vast gatherings of 20,000 people. Whitefield looked on the far-stretching mosaic of upturned countenances, black with the coal-dust of the pits, and tells in unforgettable words how, while he preached, he saw the white streaks made by the tears running down those grimy faces. "The open firmament above me," he afterwards wrote, "the prospect of the adjacent fields, with the sight of thousands and thousands, some in coaches, some on horseback, and some in the trees, and at times all affected and drenched in tears together, to which sometimes was added the solemnity of the approaching evening, was almost too much for and quite overcame me." "Blessed," he adds, "are the eyes which see the things we see."

The ecclesiastical authorities, of course, found fresh argument for a quarrel in these services. They were a new and yet more alarming expression of "enthusiasm."

The wrong thing was being done, in the wrong place, and in the wrong way. It is an amusing illustration of the frost-bitten formalism of that day to find so sensible a man as Samuel Wesley overcome with horror by the circumstance that Whitefield "never read the Liturgy to his tatterdemalions on the common!"

But if the services shocked the clerical conscience they stirred the heart of the common people. The affection Whitefield won from his hearers was childlike and touching. They hung on his words; they blessed him as he passed by them on the road; they gave him of their scanty earnings for that far-off orphan-house on American soil which already Whitefield was contemplating. They followed him with tears when he left them. These open-air services resembled the tapping of an artesian well. The dark, sunless, forgotten waters rushed up to the light.

But Whitefield had to sail for Georgia, and he summoned Wesley to leave London and come to Bristol to take up the strange work begun there. In the little society in Fetter Lane that call was heard with dread. Some dim sense of great issues hanging upon the answer to it disquieted the minds of the little company. The Bible was consulted by lot, and repeatedly, in search of a text which might be accepted as a decision. But only the most alarming passages emerged. "Get thee up into this mountain and die on the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered to thy people," ran one. When one chance-selected text proved disquieting in this fashion the lot was cast again and yet again, but always with the same result. There was a quaint mixture of superstition and simplicity in the Bibliomancy of the early Methodists. If the text which presented itself did not please it was rejected, and the sacred pages were interrogated by chance afresh, in the hope of more welcome results.

Wesley at last decided to go, but even in his ears the call to Bristol seemed a summons to the grave. Yet his purpose was unshaken, and that step decided the whole character of his after work.

He reached Bristol and stood beside Whitefield while he preached in the open air. Wesley looked with amazed eyes and gravely pondering brow on the strange and vast

congregation assembled. Then, on the morrow, in his own words, "I submitted to be more vile and, standing on a little grassy mound, preached to a great crowd from the words, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor.'"

Whitefield preached his first open-air sermon on February 17, 1739; six weeks later, on April 2, John Wesley held his first open-air service, and Charles Wesley followed the example of his comrades still later, on June 24. In his case, too, he was driven from the churches into the fields. The ecclesiastical authorities had grown sternly hostile. Charles Wesley was acting as curate, but without a licence, and preached repeatedly in Bexley Church; and the irregular vicar and still more irregular curate were summoned, on June 19, to appear before the Archbishop of Canterbury. Charles Wesley in his Journal says:—

"His Grace expressly forbade him to let any of us preach in his church, and charged us with breach of the canon. I mentioned the Bishop of London's authorising my forcible exclusion. He would not hear me; said he did not dispute. He asked me what call I had. I answered, 'A dispensation of the Gospel is committed to me.'

"'That is, to St. Paul; but I do not dispute, and will not proceed to excommunication yet.'

"'Your Grace has taught me, in your book on Church government, that a man unjustly excommunicated is not thereby cut off from communication with Christ.'

"'Of that,' he replied 'I am the judge.'

"I asked him if Mr. Whitefield's success was not a spiritual sign, and sufficient proof of his call; and recommended Gamaliel's advice. He dismissed us; Piers, with kind professions; me with all the marks of his displeasure."

This was on the Thursday. Whitefield urged him to preach in the open air on the following Sunday. "If I do this," writes Charles Wesley in perplexed meditation, "I shall break down the breach and become desperate." He decided, however, at last, and he tells in his Journal the story of that fateful Sunday.

"*Sunday, June* 24, St. John Baptist's Day.—The first Scripture I cast my eye upon was, 'Then came the servant to Him and said, Master, what shall we do?' I prayed with West and went forth

in the name of Jesus Christ. I found near ten thousand helpless sinners waiting for the word in Moorfields. I invited them in my Master's words, as well as name, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' The Lord was with me, even me, His meanest messenger, according to His promise. At St. Paul's the psalms, lessons, &c., for the day put fresh life into me. So did the Sacrament. My load was gone, and all my doubts and scruples. God shone upon my path, and I knew this was His will concerning me."

Archbishop Potter threatened to excommunicate Charles Wesley for preaching at Moorfields and Kennington Common, and the laity, too, shared the prejudices of the clergy. One surly landowner served Charles Wesley with a writ for walking over his field to address the crowd. Proceedings were settled by the payment of £10, and the bill still survives as an historical record. It runs:—

"Goter *versus* Westley. Damages, £10; costs taxed, £9, 16s. 8d. July 29, 1739, Received of Mr. Westley, by the hands of Mr. Joseph Varding, nineteen pounds sixteen shillings and sixpence, for damages and costs in their cause.

"William Gason, Attorney for the Plaintiff."

At the bottom of this instrument Charles Wesley has written, "I paid them the things I never took," and on the back the significant sentence, "To be rejudged on that day."

It is almost amusing to notice the air—as of men stepping off the solid earth into mere space, or of adventurers beginning a revolution—with which Whitefield and the Wesleys, in turn, began open-air preaching. What was there so alarming in preaching a sermon under the open sky, with the green turf for a floor, and the wide heavens for a sounding-board? As Wesley himself reflected, there are excellent precedents for open-air preaching in the New Testament. Yet he tells us, as he watched Whitefield preaching to the Kingswood colliers, how deeply the sight shocked him. "All my life till very lately," he says, "I have been so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church." Whitefield himself writes, on

April 3: "Yesterday I began to play the madman in Gloucester by preaching on a table in Thornbury Street." Yet both John and Charles Wesley preached often in the open-air on the river bank, or under the shade of a great tree in Georgia, and this without a sense of doing anything of doubtful propriety. What was it made an open-air service in England so alarming?

They were unconsciously influenced by their environment. In convention-oppressed England, upon which mere decorous use and wont lay hard and deep as a frost, to preach outside a pulpit, or anywhere except under a church roof, was little less than impiety. It was charged with the most deadly risks. Religion had to be kept under a glass shade and packed in cotton-wool. To take it into the jostling street, to expose it to the rough winds that blew on the hill-side or across the open moor, was to imperil its very existence!

England, too, it must be remembered, was a mere network of ecclesiastical parishes, and each parish was a spiritual freehold, with jealously-guarded boundaries. These new preachers were mere trespassers! They were trespassers, too, of a very disquieting quality. To the drowsy divines of that period, the spectacle of clergymen betaking themselves to the market-place, or to the village green, in search of a congregation was nothing less than alarming. And the vastness of the congregations they drew, the depth of the feelings they aroused, made the spectacle only more alarming in clerical eyes. These men were kindling a conflagration!

To Wesley and his comrades themselves the business of field preaching was at first, as we have seen, utterly distasteful. John Wesley says he "consented to become more vile" when he preached on the hillside at Kingswood. All the sensibilities of the strait-laced, order-loving High Churchman were shocked, in a word, by the experience of having to stand on common earth, while the wind blew on his bare head, and preach to a passing crowd. But Wesley, after his logical fashion, made up his mind once for all on this subject, and his conscience obeyed his logic. He was but following a great and sacred precedent in consenting in this fashion to become "a fool for Christ's sake." He puts the case with matchless force

in a letter to a friend who warned him against these vagrant and unauthorised services:—

"On Scriptural principles, I do not think it hard to justify what I do. God in Scripture commands me, according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish, that is, in effect, to do it at all, seeing I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom, then, shall I hear, God or man? 'If it be just to obey man rather than God, judge you. A dispensation of the Gospel is committed to me, and woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.' But where shall I preach it upon the principles you mention? Why not in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America; not in any of these Christian parts, at least, of the habitable earth. For all these are, after a sort, divided into parishes. If it be said, 'Go back, then, to the heathens from whence you came'—nay, but neither could I now (on your principles) preach to them, for all the heathens in Georgia belong to the parish either of Savannah or Frederica.

"Suffer me now to tell you my principles in this matter. I look upon all the world as my parish, thus far, I mean, that in whatever part of it I am I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to do; and sure I am that His blessing attends it."[1]

Its early field-preaching best expresses the essential genius of Methodism. It makes audible what may be called the imperial note in it; it makes visible, too, its passion of zeal to save lost men and women. There was in the Church life of that day little of the militant spirit. Still less was there any representation of that divinest element of Christianity, the pity that seeks the lost, seeks them with passion and sorrow; seeks with scorn of suffering and difficulty and of mere convention. All the terms of Christ's great parable were in those sad days—as too often in all days—inverted in Christ's own Church. The ninety-nine sheep were lost in the wilderness, there was only one fat, well-wooled sheep in the fold. And beside that one comfortable sheep the equally fat and drowsy shepherd slumbered, and left the ninety-nine in the wilderness to seek *him!* The wandering sheep, that is, must pursue the shepherd, and not the shepherd the

[1] Journal, June 11, 1739.

sheep! But when Whitefield and the Wesleys, with a thousand locked church doors behind them, stood before a crowd of unwashed miners at Kingswood, or a ragged multitude from the London slums at Moorfields, and proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then faith came out from behind its defences. The drowsy, slippered, arm-chair religion of the day became aggressive. It attacked, instead of waiting to be attacked. Open-air preaching in these modern days has itself become almost a convention, but in 1739 it was a revolution!

## CHAPTER IV

### THE THREE GREAT COMRADES

HERE, at the threshold of the revival, it is worth while to sketch the three great comrades who were the chief human forces in its development. At the outset it is not Wesley but Whitefield who is most conspicuous. He leads the way in the new path; he fills the largest space in the public eye. The Church doors are shutting relentlessly against Wesley. His field seems narrowing to the condemned cells where felons sat in the shadow of the gallows, and to the little societies which, on the inspiration of Peter Böhler, had been formed. But Whitefield is in the rich dawn of his fame as a preacher. Orthodox pulpits are still open to him. Charmed crowds hang on the magic of his eloquence. Whole cities stir at his coming. When he visited Bristol a second time crowds on foot, in coaches, or on horseback came out to meet him on the road. The people blessed him as he passed along the streets. In the church where he preached eager hearers clung to the rails of the organ loft, others climbed up on the leads of the very roof to catch the vibration of his matchless voice.

"In the early stages of any movement," Miss Wedgwood says, with a touch of genuine insight, "it is impulse and not weight that has most effect." And Whitefield, by a rare combination of natural gifts and of spiritual fervour, was exactly fitted to communicate impulse to the revival beginning to stir in English life.

Whitefield and Wesley, of course, represent very unlike types, and were products of unlike forces. Whitefield lacked Wesley's sure logic, his faculty for government, his passion for order and method. Wesley had the graver, deeper, stronger nature. He was slower in attainment, but more resolute in grasp. Whitefield was swifter, more

ardent and impulsive: but he possessed as profound a genius for religion as Wesley himself. He lived, moreover, in a realm of spiritual ardours unknown to Wesley. It may be added that he had the supreme gift of the orator in a form to which Wesley could not pretend. And the union of two such men, with gifts so diverse, helps to explain the great religious movement of the eighteenth century.

The contrasts and the agreements of the two men are alike remarkable. Wesley was nurtured in the gravities of a parsonage and passed straight from the shelter of the rectory roof to a great public school, and then to an ancient University. Whitefield was the son of an innkeeper, and spent his early years in the atmosphere of an inn. In his own words, he wore a blue apron, washed mops, cleaned rooms, and did the work of a tapster. His confessions of youthful vices are pitched in an almost hysterical key, and they reveal a curiously mixed character. He pilfered money from his mother's pocket—but shared the ill-got coins with the poor. He stole books—but they were pious books intended to develop religious character. He was sent to the local grammar school, found study distasteful, and swung back again to the maternal inn, with its servile tasks and ignoble companionships. The boy, however, had gleams of genius, and by happy chance secured admission to Pembroke College, Oxford, as a servitor.

He did not excel as a student, but the religious influences of the Holy Club took hold of him. The Wesleys became his spiritual guides, though he lacked their balance and sobriety. He passed through religious experiences, indeed, which would seem in place in the biography of a mediæval saint, or of an ascetic of the early Christian centuries. Vehement in everything else, he was vehement in his penitence, and in the austerities with which he afflicted his body. He clad himself in mean clothes, vexed his body by denying it sleep, ate the most distasteful food. "Whole days and weeks," he says, in his exaggerated fashion, "have I spent in lying prostrate on the ground in silent and watchful prayer." He chose the beautiful and famous Walk of Christ Church for the scene of some of his self-mortifications, and would kneel under

the trees in the darkness, in the winter rain or amid the falling snow, until the sound of the great bell warned him that the college gates were about to close. Reviewing his youth, Whitefield passes a terrible sentence on himself. "From my cradle to my manhood," he cries, "I see nothing in me but a fitness to be damned." There is a touch of the histrionic in Whitefield, even in the recital of his own spiritual biography!

Spiritual deliverance came to him at last, and came in a flood of rapture. "Oh," he cried, as he tells the story, "Oh, with what joy, joy unspeakable, even joy full of glory, when the weight of sin went off and an abiding sense of the love of God broke in. . . . Go where I would I could not avoid singing psalms almost aloud."

There was a radiant brightness in Whitefield's very nature that won universal affection, and his new spiritual mood increased that radiance. His natural gift for oratory, too, had already made itself manifest. He was recognised as being of a saintly earnestness in religion, and the one inevitable career for him was the pulpit. His friends, indeed, urged him too precipitately in that direction. "My friends," wrote Whitefield, "wanted me to knock my head against the pulpit, and how some young men stand up here and there and preach I do not know. . . . I have prayed a thousand times till the sweat has dropped from my face like rain, that God of His infinite mercy would not let me enter the Church, till He called me and thrust me to the work."

He was just twenty-one when he received deacon's orders, and he at once leaped into fame as a preacher. "I intended to make 150 sermons," he says, "and thought I would set up with a good stock-in-trade." As a matter of fact, this greatest of English preachers only possessed a single sermon when he began his preaching career. In his humility he put his first and solitary discourse into the hands of a friendly clergyman, to show how unprepared for the work of the pulpit he was. The clergyman used one-half of the sermon at his morning service, and the other half at his evening service, and returned it to its astonished author with a guinea by way of payment. In his very first effort in the pulpit Whitefield discovered

he had no need of a manuscript. So great indeed was the effect of that discourse that complaint was made to the bishop that he had driven no less than fifteen persons mad!

Whitefield was not a student, and not in any deep sense a thinker. He had few of the gifts of a leader of men. But his religious sensibilities were singularly keen. He *saw* the great truths of Christianity, where other men only reasoned about them; and the facts of the spiritual world were as real to him, and in some senses as clear, as the facts of earth and sky with which his physical senses dealt. They overwhelmed him without crushing him. "Few men," says Sir James Stephen, "ever moved amongst the infinitudes and eternities of invisible things with less embarrassment or less of silent awe than Whitefield." "Silent awe," indeed, was not possible to a man so loudly and musically vocal as Whitefield.

He was above middle height, with singularly fair complexion, regular features, and small deep-set, dark-blue eyes, which seemed to flash with brightness. One, as it happened, was set at a conflicting angle with the other, but the resultant squint—as in the case of another famous preacher, Edward Irving—only added expressiveness to his face. Whitefield had probably the most musical and "carrying" voice that ever issued from a human throat. Its sweetness hung in the charmed ears of the crowd; its cadences resembled the rise and fall of the notes of some great singer. Whitefield had, in addition, a body of iron and nerves of steel. Except Wesley himself, no other human being ever talked to such multitudes, or talked for so many hours a day, and for so many years in succession, as did Whitefield. His biographer says that "in the compass of a single week he spoke in general forty hours, very often sixty hours, and that to thousands of people." And he did this for years, and "after his labours, instead of taking rest, he was engaged in offering up prayers and intercessions, or in singing hymns, as his manner was, in every house to which he was invited." Whitefield, in a word, almost as much as Wesley, seems, in his well-nigh miraculous capacity for work, to belong to another race.

Whitefield achieved his greatest triumphs as an orator

in the open air. Sir James Stephen gives this picture of one of his open-air sermons :—

"Taking his stand on some rising knoll, his tall and graceful figure dressed with elaborate propriety, and composed into an easy and commanding attitude, Whitefield's 'clear blue eye' ranged over thousands, drawn up in close files on the plain below, or clustering into masses on every adjacent eminence. . . . But the rich and varied tones of a voice of unequalled depth and compass quickly silenced every ruder sound—as in rapid succession its ever-changing melodies passed from the calm of simple narrative, and the measured distinctness of argument, to the vehemence of reproof, and the pathos of heavenly consolation. Sometimes the preacher wept exceedingly, stamped loudly and passionately, and was frequently so overcome that for a few seconds one would suspect he could never recover, and when he did, nature required some little time to compose herself. The agitated assembly caught the passions of the speaker, and exulted, wept, or trembled at his bidding."

Whitefield preached under conditions and to audiences known to no other orators. Passing over Hampton Common he finds a crowd of 12,000 people collected to see a man hung in chains. Here is an audience, a pulpit, a text; and straightway he captures the crowd! He preaches to another vast multitude assembled to see a man hanged, and the hangman himself suspends his office while Whitefield discourses. Some wandering players have set up their stage at a country fair; the crowd rushes together to grin and to jest. But Whitefield suddenly appears, turns the whole scene to religious uses, spoils the players' harvest, and preaches a sermon of overwhelming power.

As an orator Whitefield had some strange characteristics. An ordinary preacher, if he has delivered one discourse a dozen times, feels that he has preached it to rags; the sound of it becomes hateful to his own ears. The discourse is exhausted of all vitality. But Whitefield never reached his highest point of effectiveness in a sermon until he had preached it forty times! Then it became on his lips a perfect instrument of persuasion.

It is computed that he preached over 18,000 sermons; sixty-three of these were published by himself during

his lifetime, and the puzzled reader searches them in vain to discover the secret of their marvellous power. They seem commonplace, familiar, egotistical, and even tawdry. The secret of their power lay in the personality of the preacher—the expressive eyes, the matchless voice, the trembling lips, the face that seemed to shine as with a mystic light. And all these were but the instruments and servants of a passionate and spiritual earnestness, such as seldom burned in a human soul. Here was a man with a single purpose, who believed with absolute conviction every syllable of his message. His vision of heaven and of hell was as direct as that of the great Florentine. And what he saw he had the orator's power, the great actor's power, of making others see. And through all Whitefield's oratory glowed — sometimes flamed—a passion of love for his hearers. "You feel," says Sir James Stephen, "that you have to do with a man who lived and spoke, and who gladly would have died, to turn his hearers from the path of destruction and to guide them to holiness and peace."

All Whitefield's sermons, it may be added, are but so many variations of two ideas: man is guilty, but may obtain forgiveness through Jesus Christ; man is deathless; he stands at a point betwixt the two mighty opposites of eternal suffering and of eternal bliss. The great preacher's oratory was thus a fiddle with only two strings. But what deep and moving harmonies they yielded!

Wesley and Whitefield differed at many points both of theology and of practical morality. Whitefield was an ardent Calvinist, Wesley a convinced Arminian. Wesley branded slavery as the sum of all villainies; Whitefield bought slaves in the interests of his orphan-house in Georgia, includes them as cattle in the list of his stock, and piously thanks God for their increase. But in spite of all their points of difference Wesley and Whitefield belong to the same spiritual type, lived under the empire of the same lofty motives, and had almost equal partnership in the greatest religious movement in English history. Southey, indeed, declares that "if the Wesleys had never existed Whitefield would have given birth to Methodism"; and there was perhaps never written a

sentence of less insight. Whatever Whitefield might have done, he himself, the most erratic and planless of men, could never have built the enduring and stately fabric of Methodism. Whitefield's influence resembles the gale sweeping over the surface of the sea. The effect is instant, and visible to every sense. But of Wesley's work the true symbol is the coral reef, built up slowly, and cell by cell, in the sea depths, over which the soil forms, and on which great cities will rise and unborn nations live. The one stirred the surface; the other built up from the depths, built deeply, and built for all time.

Whitefield's ideal was to fly from one crowd of waiting hearers to another. Wesley had the social instinct. He knew the forces born of companionship, the shelter created by companionship. So from the very beginning of his work he was busy organising little societies where spiritual life could be sheltered and nourished; societies which supplied an external reflex for the inner spiritual experience of those who belonged to them. While Whitefield was moving the crowds, Wesley was organising these tiny centres of living structure; and the societies Wesley gathered were the cells in the coral reef!

Wesley, of course, did not invent the societies into which he gathered his converts. Such societies sprang into existence by way of protest against the black night of immorality which settled down over England after the Restoration and before Wesley himself was born. Böhler revived these societies, and gave them a more spiritual tone. Miss Wedgwood, in view of this, says that "England gave the form of the societies, and Germany the spirit." This is one of those plausible generalities which delight the ear but do not endure the test of facts. All that need be noted just now, however, is that when Wesley returned from Germany and began the real work of his life, by some wise, unconscious instinct he busied himself in nourishing and multiplying the societies which, in concert with Peter Böhler, he had already begun to form. This work was less dramatic and immediately visible than that of Whitefield's, but it was more enduring.

It is the fashion to say of Whitefield and John and Charles Wesley that the first was the orator, the second the statesman, the third the singer, of the great religious

movement of the eighteenth century. But the three actors in that great drama are hardly to be packed into separate compartments, and labelled, in this fashion. John Wesley had more than a touch of the poet, as well as the genius of a statesman; and if oratory is the art of using human speech as an instrument of overwhelming persuasion, then Charles Wesley was an orator as truly as his elder brother, or as Whitefield himself, though of a quite different type.

Charles Wesley, tried by the test of the work he accomplished, was one of the greatest masters of persuasive speech. For fifteen years he moved through the towns and villages of England and Ireland, preaching in crowded churches or to vast multitudes under the open skies, and always with strange power. There is something almost awe-inspiring in the sight of a multitude of 15,000 or 20,000 people standing silent, hushed, and expectant, waiting for the sound of a single human voice. Whitefield himself, the greatest of field-preachers, has told how the sight impressed him. "All was hushed when I began," he says, "and the people, standing round the hill in the profoundest silence, filled me with admiration. To behold such crowds standing together in such a silence, or to hear the echo of their singing running from one end of them to the other, was very solemn."

To draw such a crowd, to hold it spell-bound, to sway it with religious emotion, to melt it into penitence, to kindle it to joy, is one of the greatest tasks for which human speech has ever been used. To do it day after day, sometimes two or three times in a single day; to do it for fifteen years as the ordinary business of life; to do it intermittently till old age, is a task the mere vision of which might have stricken Demosthenes with despair. And Charles Wesley performed this strange feat! He had not the organ-like voice and the dramatic genius of Whitefield, nor yet his brother's strange secret of calm and overwhelming solemnity of address. The secret of Charles Wesley's power in preaching lay in the realm of the emotions. The tears ran down his cheeks; his voice took cadences of infinite tenderness. It shook with a trembling pathos of emotion; and the contagion of his feeling melted whole crowds.

In old age Charles Wesley's preaching took a curious character. He preached with his eyes closed, making long pauses, with bent and listening head, as though waiting for some message from unseen realms. He fumbled with his hands about his breast, or leaned upon the pulpit Bible with his elbows. He sometimes paused and asked the congregation to sing a hymn until his message came to him. But in the prime of his life he was a preacher of almost unsurpassed power, talking in sentences which had the rush and impact of bullets, but which vibrated with electric thrills of emotion.

Charles Wesley's development of extraordinary power in preaching was both sudden and unexpected. He notes with characteristic accuracy the exact date when he first attempted to preach without notes. "At St. Antholin's Church, on Friday, October 20," he says, "seeing so few present, I thought of preaching extempore. I was afraid; yet I ventured on the promise, 'Lo, I am with you always.'" Only a few months afterwards he could stand up before a crowd of 15,000 people and speak without fear, or pause, or failure of power, for two unbroken hours.

Charles Wesley had his limitations. He never could succeed, for example, in getting his natural feelings and his formal ecclesiastical beliefs to agree together. His best biographer, Thomas Jackson, says that through many years he entertained on various subjects two conflicting sets of principles, and acted on them alternately with equal sincerity, and without even suspecting their inconsistency! But this is hardly just to Charles Wesley. The fact is he felt truth rather than reasoned about it, and his feelings were wiser than his reasoned beliefs. But it is quite true that he remained delightfully and permanently unconscious of the discord betwixt his theories and his feelings.

He was in theory a High Churchman of the narrowest order. He declared that if he left the Church of England he would be afraid to meet the disembodied spirit of his father in Paradise. That most irascible of High Churchmen, in such a cause, would quarrel with him even in those celestial realms! Charles Wesley's inconsistencies, bred of the unconscious conflict betwixt his generous

impulses and his ecclesiastical prejudices, are amusing. He was the first to administer the Sacrament to the new converts in an unconsecrated building, yet he was filled with pious horror when the Methodists asked to receive the Sacrament at the hands of their own preachers. He spent his earlier years in open-air preaching, and the years of his old age in preaching in City Road Chapel; yet he made it his dying charge that his bones should not lie in the grounds of that chapel, because they were unconsecrated. "It is a pity," wrote his wiser brother John, afterwards, "that my brother's bones were not deposited where my bones will lie. Certainly that ground is as holy as any in England; it contains many bonny dead." It is an example of the irony of things that Charles Wesley's sacerdotal horror at the thought of his bones resting in the grounds of City Road Chapel has had the effect of dismissing them to soil still less sacred. The particular part of the churchyard where they sleep was, it seems, never consecrated!

Charles Wesley said, "My brother is all hope, I am all fear;" but that is not quite accurate. Charles was in temperament as sanguine as his brother John, but one side of his nature made him fear the results of the very things which the other and nobler side of his nature made him do.

He was a little, short-sighted man, of hurrying speech, odd in manner, desultory in mental habit, hot in his resentments, most loyal in his friendships, and with a simplicity of mind which made him eminently lovable. He lacked the strength, the fixity of purpose, the keen logic, the ordered and systematic intellect of his greater brother. But he outran him in some things, and was, perhaps, the more lovable of the two for the very reason that he was less faultlessly perfect. For love is sometimes nourished by the things it has to forgive.

# CHAPTER V

## WESLEY AS A PREACHER

THE great revival was by this time in full progress, and even at this early stage two concurrent and parallel lines of work are visible in it. One is aggressive, and consists of a great chain of preaching services stretching through the whole of Wesley's lifetime, and covering the three kingdoms. The other is conservative, and is represented by the tiny societies which were formed everywhere, and within whose sheltering curves the new converts were gathered.

Wesley's supreme instrument was preaching. He used other forces; he built schools, he organised societies, he published books, he waged great controversies, he was tireless in correspondence and conversation. But not literature, or controversy, or personal influence is Wesley's trusted and most effective instrument. First and last the movement Wesley represents is the revival on an unprecedented scale, and with unprecedented effects, of the office and work of the preacher. "It pleased God," wrote Paul, as the spokesman of the earliest Christian generation, "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." And in Wesley's movement Christianity simply reverted to its first and greatest instrument of power.

But the preaching of the new movement, as we have seen, broke away from traditional forms. It was open-air preaching, not imprisoned in stone walls. It was itinerant preaching, not confined to fixed spots. It took the three kingdoms for its field. It turned aside from the drowsy handfuls in the churches, and sought with eager pity the forgotten multitudes outside them, fast drifting into a worse heathenism than that which lay on British soil before Augustine landed. Instead of the pulpit the preachers of the great revival took the hill-side, the market-place, the village green, the stony city lane; wherever men would listen there they delivered their message.

And the new conditions created new methods. The decorous platitudes of drowsy divines, mumbled to nodding congregations, gave place to the living speech of living men; of men with a message, who felt themselves to be the direct spokesmen of the Spirit of God. If Wesley and his comrades had not been thrust out of the churches, the essential genius of the movement, the nature of the work to be done, the methods necessary for its accomplishment, would have taken them out. The ancient channels through which truth ran were narrow at best, and they had become fatally clogged. No current could stir in them. New channels must be opened; new forces called into exercise; new classes reached. So at its very first step the great revival breaks out of existing ecclesiastical boundaries. It betakes itself to the busy street, the wind-swept moors, wherever men and women for whom Christ died could be gathered. This was preaching as the first Christian century knew it.

And Wesley quickly became the most commanding figure in the new crusade. He lacked some of Whitefield's special gifts as an orator, yet he somehow was as successful in open-air preaching as even his great comrade; and he brought to the work more orderly plans, and a more concentrated purpose, than even Whitefield.

What was the secret of Wesley's power as a preacher? In many respects it might be imagined that he was the last man to sway an eighteenth century crowd. He was a gentleman by birth and habit, a scholar by training, a man of fine and almost fastidious taste, with an Englishman's uneasy dislike of emotion, and a High Churchman's hatred of irregularity. He had little imagination and no descriptive power. He told no ancedotes, as a rule, and certainly fired off no jests. What fitness had he to talk to peasants, to miners, to the rabble of the city, to the slow-thinking farmer drawn from his plough-tail?

Yet he stood up, a little, trim, symmetrical figure; his smooth black hair exactly parted; his complexion clear and pure as that of a girl; his hazel eyes flashing like points of steel. And beneath his words the crowd was melted and subdued until it resembled a routed army shaken with fear and broken with emotion; men and women not seldom falling to the ground in a passion of distress. His voice

had no trumpet notes; but it was clear as a silver flute, and ran across the wondering crowd to its farthest verge.

There was undoubtedly something of prophet-like force in Wesley's preaching. He drew his inspiration from far-off realms. His printed sermons are only the bones of his spoken discourses, and they are commonly dry as bones, though they have something of mastodon-like scale. But his spiritual insight was hardly less than terrible. He seemed to see into men's souls; to put his finger upon the hidden sin, the unconfessed fear. He had the power of making each man feel as though he talked to him alone. And there was something in his discourse—a note in his voice, a flash in his eye—that thrilled the crowd with awe, awe that not seldom deepened into dread. The mood of the speaker was one of perfect calmness. But it was the calm of power, of certainty, of an authority which ran back into the spiritual world. Nelson gives perhaps the best picture of John Wesley as a preacher. He says:—

"Mr. Whitefield was to me as a man who could play well on an instrument, for his preaching was pleasant to me, and I loved the man; so that if any one offered to disturb him, I was ready to fight for him. But I did not understand him. I was like a wandering bird cast out of its nest till Mr. John Wesley came to preach his first sermon at Moorfields. . . . As soon as he got upon the stand, he stroked back his hair and turned his face towards where I stood, and, I thought, fixed his eyes upon me. His countenance fixed such an awful dread upon me, before I heard him speak, that it made my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock; and when he did speak, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me. When he had done I said, 'This man can tell the secrets of my heart; he hath not left me there; for he hath showed the remedy, even the blood of Jesus.' I thought he spoke to no one but me, and I durst not look up, for I imagined all the people were looking at me. . . . But before Mr. Wesley concluded his sermon he cried out, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.' I said, 'If that be true, I will turn to God to-day.'"

Who can wonder that a preacher with this strange power could shake the hearts of multitudes, and stamp himself on the imagination of the three kingdoms!

With the exception of a few brief visits to London, and a hasty run into Wales, Wesley spent the remainder of 1739 in Bristol. In nine months, it is reckoned, he delivered at least five hundred sermons and expositions, and only six of these were in churches. His plan was to expound the Bible in one or other of the little societies every night, and spend the days in open-air services. He has left on record his teaching at this period, and to his open-air audiences. Religion, he proclaimed, does not consist in negatives; in external morality; in orthodox opinions. It is the creation of a new nature in us. The sole condition is repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He that believes is justified by the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and, being justified, has the consciousness of a new relation to God and of power over sin.

This is simple and obvious teaching, but it is curious to note that the doctrine that we are saved through faith, which is the very essence of Christianity, and which was now the burden of Wesley's sermons, kindled the most active enmity. Says Wesley:—

"We could hardly speak of anything else, either in public or private. It shone upon our minds with so strong a light that it was our constant theme. It was our daily subject, both in verse and prose; and we vehemently defended it against all mankind. But, in doing this, we were assaulted and abused on every side. We were everywhere represented as mad dogs, and treated accordingly. We were stoned in the streets, and several times narrowly escaped with our lives. In sermons, newspapers, and pamphlets of all kinds, we were painted as unheard-of monsters. But this moved us not."

The preaching begun under these new conditions was attended by marvellous results. It was the preaching of early apostolic times, and with many of the results of the apostolic age. Whole pages of John Wesley's Journal, indeed, resemble a new chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, written in modern terms. It is inscribed with the records of conversions; of conversions sudden in point of time, dramatic in character, rapturous in joy. Later Wesley, after his methodical fashion, asked some of his converts to write in plain and sober prose the story of their spiritual

experiences, and the result is a series of human documents of enduring and curious interest. The flight of a century still leaves them vivid.

Wesley's own account of the practical results of the work is thus given in reply to an angry critic:—

"The question between us turns chiefly, if not wholly, on matter of fact. You deny that God does now work these effects; at least, that He works them in this manner. I affirm both; because I have heard these things with my own ears, and have seen them with my eyes. I have seen (as far as a thing of this kind can be seen) very many persons changed in a moment from the spirit of fear, horror, despair, to the spirit of love, joy, and peace; and from sinful desire, till then reigning over them, to a sure desire of doing the will of God. These are matters of fact, whereof I have been and almost daily am an eye or ear witness. . . . And that such a change was then wrought, appears (not from their shedding tears only, or falling into fits, or crying out; these are not the fruits, as you seem to suppose, whereby I judge, but) from the whole tenor of their life, till then, many ways wicked; from that time holy, just, and good.

"I will show you him that was a lion till then, and is now a lamb, him that was a drunkard, and is now exemplarily sober; the whoremonger that was, who now abhors the very 'garment spotted by the flesh.' These are my living arguments for what I assert, viz. 'that God does now, as aforetime, give remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, even to us and to our children.'"[1]

But a feature began presently to emerge in Wesley's meetings which is still a puzzle to science, and which at the moment seemed to justify the worst things Wesley's angriest critics could say about the revival. Remarkable scenes of physical agitation and distress broke out. It was as if some sudden blast of energy, outside the order of nature—whether evil or good could not be easily determined—swept over the listening multitudes. The first of these strange scenes occurred on April 17, 1739, at a meeting of one of the societies. Wesley tells the story in his Journal:—

"At Baldwin Street, we called upon God to confirm His word. Immediately, one that stood by cried out aloud, with the utmost

[1] Journal, May 20, 1739.

vehemence, even in the agonies of death. But we continued in prayer, till a new song was put into her mouth, a thanksgiving unto our God. Soon after, two other persons were seized with strong pain and constrained to roar for the disquietude of their heart. But it was not long before they likewise burst forth into praise to God their Saviour."

A still more remarkable scene took place in the same locality a fortnight later. Wesley records in his Journal:—

"*May* 1.—At Baldwin Street, my voice could scarce be heard amidst the groanings of some, and the cries of others calling aloud to Him that is mighty to save. A Quaker, who stood by, was very angry, and was biting his lips, and knitting his brows, when he dropped down as thunder-struck. The agony he was in was even terrible to behold. We prayed for him, and he soon lifted up his head with joy, and joined us in thanksgiving. A bystander, John Hayden, a weaver, a man of regular life and conversation, one that constantly attended the public prayers and Sacrament, and was zealous for the Church, and against Dissenters, laboured to convince the people that all this was a delusion of the devil; but next day, while reading a sermon on 'Salvation by Faith,' he suddenly changed colour, fell off his chair, and began screaming, and beating himself against the ground. The neighbours were alarmed and flocked together. When I came in I found him on the floor, the room being full of people, and two or three holding him as well as they could. He immediately fixed his eyes on me, and said, 'Ay, this is he I said deceived the people. But God has overtaken me. I said it was a delusion of the devil; but this is no delusion.' Then he roared aloud, 'O thou devil! thou cursed devil! yea, thou legion of devils! thou canst not stay in me. Christ will cast thee out. I know His work is begun. Tear me in pieces if thou wilt, but thou canst not hurt me.' He then beat himself against the ground; his breast heaving as if in the pangs of death, and great drops of sweat trickling down his face. We all betook ourselves to prayer. His pangs ceased, and both his body and soul were set at liberty. With a clear, strong voice he cried, 'This is the Lord's doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from this time forth for evermore.' I called again an hour after. We found his body weak as that of an infant, and his voice lost; but his soul was in peace, full of love, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God."

On May 21 the scene was repeated, but this time in one of the open-air services:—

"While I was preaching, God began to make bare His arm, not in a close room, neither in private, but in the open air, and before more than two thousand witnesses. One, and another, and another were struck to the earth; exceedingly trembling at the presence of His power. Others cried, with a loud and bitter cry, 'What must we do to be saved?' In the evening, at St. Nicholas Street, I was interrupted, almost as soon as I had begun to speak, by the cries of one who strongly cried for pardon and peace. Others dropped down as dead. Thomas Maxfield began to roar out, and beat himself against the ground, so that six men could scarcely hold him. Many others began to cry out to the Saviour of all, insomuch that all the house, and indeed all the street for some space, was in an uproar. But we continued in prayer, and the greater part found rest to their souls."

These extraordinary manifestations startled and disquieted even Wesley's comrades. Whitefield wrote to him on June 25, blaming Wesley for "giving so much encouragement to these convulsions. Were I to do so," he said, "how many would cry out every night." Twelve days later Whitefield was in Bristol, and found that the same scenes attended his own service:—

"In the application of his sermon, four persons sank down close to him almost in the same moment. One of them lay without either sense or motion. A second trembled exceedingly. The third had strong convulsions all over his body, but made no noise unless by groans. The fourth, equally convulsed, called upon God with strong cries and tears."

These outbreaks of physical anguish were not confined to public services and to crowds; they seized individuals in their homes. Here is one terrible story which Wesley records in his Journal:—

"*October* 23.—I was pressed to visit a young woman at Kingswood. I found her on the bed, two or three persons holding her. Anguish, horror, and despair, above all description, appeared in her pale face. The thousand distortions of her whole body showed how the dogs of hell were gnawing at her heart. The shrieks intermixed were scarce to be endured. She screamed out, 'I am damned, damned; lost for ever! Six days ago you might have

helped me. But it is past. I am the devil's now, I have given myself to him; his I am, him I must serve, with him I must go to hell; I will be his, I will serve him, I will go with him to hell; I cannot be saved, I will not be saved. I must, I will, I will be damned!' She then began praying to the devil. We began to sing, 'Arm of the Lord, awake! awake!' She immediately sank down as asleep; but, as soon as we left off, broke out again, with inexpressible vehemence: 'Stony hearts, break! I am a warning to you. Break, break, poor stony hearts! I am damned that you may be saved. You need not be damned, though I must.' She then fixed her eyes on a corner of the ceiling, and said, 'There he is. Come, good devil, come. You said you would dash my brains out; come, do it quickly. I am yours, I will be yours.' We interrupted her by calling again upon God; on which she sank down as before."

A similar instance took place a few days afterwards:—

"*October* 27.—I was sent for to Kingswood again, to one of those who had been so ill before. A violent rain began just as I set out. Just at that time, the woman (then three miles off) cried out, 'Yonder comes Wesley, galloping as fast as he can!' When I was come she burst into a horrid laughter, and said, 'No power, no power; no faith, no faith. She is mine, her soul is mine. I have her, and will not let her go.' We begged of God to increase our faith. Meanwhile her pangs increased more and more; so that one would have imagined, by the violence of her throes, her body must have been shattered to pieces. One, who was clearly convinced this was no natural disorder, said, 'I think Satan is let loose. I fear he will not stop here,' and added, 'I command thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to tell if thou hast commission to torment any other soul.' It was immediately answered—'I have. L——y C——r, and S——h J——s.' We betook ourselves to prayer again; and ceased not till she began, with a clear voice, and composed, cheerful look, to sing, 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.'"

The persons named in this case lived at some distance; they were at the moment in perfect health; but a day afterwards they were affected in exactly the same way as the unfortunate woman whose case has been described.

Many explanations of these curious phenomena are offered. Southey resolves them into mere animal mag-

netism and the contagion of excitement. "There are passions," he says truly enough, "which are as infectious as the plague, and fear itself is not more so than fanaticism." But the sensibilities and emotions to which Wesley was making his appeal when these scenes broke out certainly cannot be placed under the category of "fanaticism"; nor was there anything being said or done at the moment to awaken "fear." Isaac Taylor finds in these scenes a reproduction in modern terms of the demoniacal possessions recorded in the New Testament. To the purely secular mind they perhaps recall the dancing mania of the fourteenth century, or the *convulsionnaires* of France in the sixteenth century. Only in Wesley's case the subject of these manifestations were solid Englishmen, and not excitable French women and children.

As a matter of fact similar phenomena have made their appearance at widely remote points of time and under very unlike circumstances. Exactly such scenes occurred in Scotland under Erskine's preaching, and in America under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards. But Edwards undoubtedly preached a terrifying gospel, and preached it in a terrifying way. Wesley's methods were parted by a very wide interval indeed from those of the great New England evangelist.

Wonder is often expressed that these manifestations began, not under the preaching of Whitefield, with his lion-like voice and dramatic powers; nor yet under that of Charles Wesley, with his concentrated and overwhelming appeal to the emotions. They occurred while John Wesley, with his grave brow, his composed look, his clear and level voice, his appeal to reason and conscience, was preaching. And yet it is intelligible why these phenomena began under the preaching of John Wesley rather than under that of either of his comrades. Whitefield appealed to the senses and to the imagination, Charles Wesley to the emotions. But John Wesley, for all his strange calmness, struck a deeper note, and moved his hearers with mightier forces. There was something in him—in his look, in the cadences of his voice, in his solemn and transparent earnestness—which brought irresistibly home to those who looked on him and listened to him a sense of

eternal things. Wesley, says Miss Wedgwood, "wrought in his hearers such a sense of the horror of evil, of its mysterious closeness to the human soul, and of the need of a miracle for the separation of the two, that no one perhaps could suddenly receive without some violent physical effect."

But this does not cover the whole case. The truth is, Wesley saw with Dante-like vision, and had the power to make others see, that supreme fact of the spiritual world, the close relation in which the human soul stands to God; how near God is to man; in what relation man's sin stands to God's purity, man's need to God's pity, and all man's acts to God's judgment. So from the dim, remote, far-off spaces of the heavens, God appeared to Wesley's hearers, a Figure loving and awful, and above all, at the very touch! And as Wesley preached, and there suddenly broke upon his hearers this sense of the eternal world with its tremendous issues, of sin and its infinite guilt, of God and the relation of the soul to Him—what wonder that the shaken souls of his hearers not seldom communicated their tremors to the bodies that held them!

Many human elements were, no doubt, amongst the forces which produced these scenes: imposture, hysteria, the contagion of strong emotions, the fire of excitement burning in the senses. But when allowance has been made for these there is a residuum of strange fact which they do not explain. All that can be said is that body and soul are strangely interknitted; their boundaries cannot be exactly defined; they act and react on each other. A wasting disease affects every mood of the mind. The wine of a strong and deep emotion, poured through the feelings, thrills every physical organ. And spiritual emotions, since they awaken at a greater depth, and beat with a stronger pulse than any other of which the human soul is capable, may well, when once they are aroused, affect with strange force the body itself. Only those will doubt this who have never felt the awe of deep spiritual feeling.

It can be easily understood how these strange phenomena supplied those who hated the whole movement with new arguments against it. They constituted a loud, wide-

spread, and clamorous scandal. But at least they advertised the revival. They filled all minds with wonder and all lips with gossip. A strange force seemed to have broken out of the unseen world on mankind. It was easy to suspect the new movement, to vehemently dislike it, to argue loudly against it. It was not possible to ignore it!

# CHAPTER VI

## THE GREAT ITINERANT

Wesley quickly came to his natural place as the leader and representative of the new movement. He was not merely its theologian and statesman, its scholar, its chief controversialist; he was its foremost and most diligent, if not its greatest, preacher. His career as an evangelist, now in full progress, deserves some study, for there is no other, for range, continuity, and permanent results, to approach it in modern history.

Wesley preached his first open-air sermon on April 2, 1739, and his last at Winchelsea on October 7, 1790. Betwixt those two dates lie fifty-one years, filled with a strain of toil almost without parallel in human experience. At the beginning of this period his two comrades, Whitefield and his brother Charles, were in gifts and zeal his peers. Charles Wesley married in 1749, and his work as an itinerant shrank at once to very narrow limits. Whitefield died in America on September 30, 1770. Wesley thus, in what may be called the full strain of aggressive work, exceeded his brother by more than forty years, and Whitefield by more than twenty. His work, it may be added, was of a more concentrated type than that of either of his two comrades. In mere scale of labour Wesley far outran Whitefield. Whitefield preached, it is computed, 18,000 sermons, more than ten a week for thirty-four years of evangelistic life. Wesley preached 42,400 sermons after his return from Georgia, an average of more than fifteen a week; and he travelled, it is computed, in his itinerant work, more than 250,000 miles. Wesley, in a word, was a man who, if he had the brain of a statesman, the culture of a scholar, the message of an apostle, had also the glowing and tireless zeal of a preaching friar of the Middle Ages.

His work throughout these fifty-one years was of an

unvarying type. It was the proclamation to the crowd, wherever he could gather one—on hill-side or river-bank, in the village market-place or under a church roof—of the unchanged and unchanging message of Christ's Gospel. Wesley never wearied, never faltered, never doubted, never turned aside. His comrades lagged behind him; his friends forsook him; a world of angry controversy eddied about his name and character. None of these things affected Wesley. The clear flame of his zeal burned long, burned undimmed, burned still, when even the fire of life turned to ashes.

Who plots on a map of England Wesley's preaching tours becomes sensible of certain constant features in the lines along which these tours moved. They did not cover the whole of England. They ran in certain well-marked geographical curves. In his evangelistic campaigns Wesley—to borrow the terminology of the soldier—had three bases—London, Bristol, and Newcastle-on-Tyne. They formed, roughly, an isosceles triangle; and Wesley's tours—allowing for a certain percentage of oscillation—ran to and fro betwixt these three points. He must have known the road westward from London to Bristol, and northward from London to Newcastle-on-Tyne, as a city postman knows his round. Why did Wesley keep so obstinately to these particular lines? Why did he leave such wide spaces of England practically unvisited?

A little consideration supplies the explanation. The chief feature of English history from the middle of the eighteenth century is the rise of the great manufacturing towns. In the last fifty years of the eighteenth century the population of England increased fifty per cent. This was the result of the industrial revival, which changed the whole life of England and gave to her the leadership of commercial Europe. Now, Wesley's preaching tours followed roughly the lines of England's industrial development. He travelled where population was thickest. He left almost unvisited the wide green fields of rural districts, with their slow-moving, scanty population. But where the stream of life was deepest; where tiny villages were growing into busy cities; where tall chimneys filled the skies with their blackness, there Wesley preached

and toiled. His mission began with the miners of Kingswood. It ran, almost throughout his whole career, amongst the crowds of the manufacturing cities. Wesley thus—with perhaps unconscious wisdom — was baptizing with divine forces the new fermenting life of his day.

His tours, it may be added, were planned out in advance with great minuteness—the places he was to visit, the hours at which he would arrive, the services to be held. There were no wasted moments, no omitted opportunities, no intervals of rest. And Wesley carried out his "appointments" with iron resolution. Nor storm, nor distance, nor weariness availed to intercept his planet-like course. His custom was to preach in the morning at five o'clock, or even earlier. He then mounted his horse, or entered his chaise, and rode or drove to the next place he had appointed, where another great crowd waited for him. So throughout all the hours of the day, and all the days of the week, and all the weeks of the year, for a long half-century. He lived like a soldier on a campaign—lightly equipped, and ready at a moment to march. But for him it was a campaign of fifty years!

And yet he was a man of exquisite neatness and order, with the delight of a scholar in having everything perfect about him. "In his chamber and study, during his winter months of residence in London, not a book was misplaced or even a scrap of paper left unheeded. He could enjoy every convenience of life; and yet he acted in the smallest things like a man who was not to continue an hour in one place. He appeared at home in every place—settled, satisfied, and happy; and yet was ready any hour to take a journey of a thousand miles."

The mere physical strain of such a career can hardly be estimated. The incessant travelling under the wet and changeful English skies, and on the rough English roads of that day, was a stupendous toil. Wesley travelled usually 4500 miles a year, mostly on horseback, and this down to nearly his seventieth year. And while travelling at this rate he generally preached two, three—sometimes even four—sermons a day. He lived in crowds. His life, for so many hours each day, was full of noise, hurry, and agitation. And yet in all this incessant travelling and

preaching he carried with him the studious and meditative habits of the philosopher!

His light, compact figure had the consistency and toughness of so much india-rubber. Nothing tired him; few things disturbed him. He was as insensible to vicissitudes of weather as a North Sea pilot. There was not a soft fibre, not an unhealthy nerve or a relaxed muscle, not an ounce of unnecessary flesh, in his wonderful little body. Every waking moment had its task, and no one ever gave fewer hours to sleep than did John Wesley.

He records that he rode in one day a distance of more than ninety miles between Bawtry and Epworth; and, at the end, "was little more tired than when he rose in the morning." In Scotland, he reached Cupar, "after travelling near ninety miles," and "was not in the least tired." "Many a rough journey," says Wesley, "have I had before, but one like this I never had, between wind and rain, and ice and snow, and driving sleet and piercing cold." Under such harsh conditions he had ridden 280 miles in six days.

There is something almost amusing in the brevity, and more than philosophic coolness, with which Wesley records his experiences as a traveller, in the wild weather, and on the rough roads of that time. He gives us little vignettes of the scenery and weather—snow landscapes, pictures of dripping skies, of bitter, blowing winds—in spite of which he is seen struggling on indomitably to his appointments. He is too busy, perhaps, to attend to the weather very much, or to describe his own feelings about it. He tells the simple, matter-of-fact story in the most matter-of-fact way. Here is one of his little weather vignettes:—

"The hills were covered with snow, as in the depth of winter. About two we came to Trewint, wet and weary enough, having been battered by the rain and hail for some hours. I preached in the evening to many more than the house would contain, on the happiness of him whose sins are forgiven."

A companion picture, which may well make the soft-fibred and comfort-loving modern reader shiver, comes a little later:—

"There was so much snow about Boroughbridge that we could go on but very slowly, insomuch that the night overtook us when we wanted six or seven miles to the place where we designed to

lodge. But we pushed on, at a venture, across the moor, and, about eight, came safe to Sandhutton. . . . We found the roads abundantly worse than they had been the day before; not only because the snows were deeper, which made the causeways in many places unpassable—and turnpike-roads were not known in these parts of England till years after—but likewise because the hard frost, succeeding the thaw, had made all the ground like glass. We were often obliged to walk, it being impossible to ride, and our horses several times fell down while we were leading them, but not once while we were riding them, during the whole journey. It was past eight before we got to Gateshead Fell, which appeared a pathless waste of white. The snow filling up and covering all the roads, we were at a loss how to proceed, when an honest man of Newcastle overtook and guided us safe into the town.

"Many a rough journey have I had before, but one like this I never had; between wind, and hail, and rain, and ice, and snow, and driving sleet, and piercing cold. But it is past; those days will return no more, and are therefore as though they had never been."

It is to be noted that Wesley had not always the exhilaration of admiring crowds to inspire him. Some of his open-air services were begun under circumstances which might well have taxed the courage of an apostle—if only because the human conditions were so chilling. Thus he describes an open-air meeting in Scotland:—

"At eleven I went into the main street, and began speaking to a congregation of two men and two women. These were soon joined by above twenty children. . . . At six William Coward and I went to the Market-house. We stayed some time, and neither man, woman, nor child came near us. At length I began singing a Scotch psalm, and fifteen or twenty people came within hearing, but with great circumspection, keeping their distance, as though they knew not what might follow."

This, it may be added, was on his third visit to Scotland, when he was a man of fame.

An example of how Wesley attacked a great town is found in the story of how he conducted his first service in Newcastle:—

"At seven I walked down to Sandgate, the poorest and most contemptible part of the town and, standing at the end of the street with John Taylor, began to sing the Hundredth Psalm.

Three or four people came out to see what was the matter; who soon increased to four or five hundred. I suppose there might be twelve or fifteen hundred before I had done preaching; to whom I applied those solemn words: 'He was wounded for our transgressions.' Observing the people, when I had done, to stand gaping and staring upon me, with the most profound astonishment, I told them: 'If you desire to know who I am, my name is John Wesley. At five in the evening, with God's help, I design to preach here again.' At five, the hill on which I designed to preach was covered from the top to the bottom. I never saw so large a number of people gathered together, either in Moorfields or at Kennington Common. I knew it was not possible for the one-half to hear, although my voice was then strong and clear; and I stood so as to have them all in view, as they were ranged on the side of the hill. The Word of God which I set before them was: 'I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely.' After preaching, the poor people were ready to tread me under foot, out of pure love and kindness. It was some time before I could possibly get out of the press. I then went back another way than I came; but several people were got to our inn before me; by whom I was vehemently importuned to stay with them, at least, a few days; or, at least, one day more. But I could not consent, having given my word to be at Birstal, with God's help, on Tuesday night."

Wesley, however, had to face not merely stormy skies and weary, interminable journeys. He had to endure an amazing amount of obloquy and public abuse, hardening not seldom into gusts of stern and cruel persecution. The England of the latter half of the eighteenth century was brutal and untaught. Its temper was cruel; its very sports were marked by an almost incredible savagery. And the crowds of that day found as much pleasure in harrying an unfortunate Methodist preacher as in watching a prize-fight or in baiting a bear. Wesley tells the story of these persecutions in his own brief, composed fashion, without comment or complaint; but behind his calm syllables are records of human brutality—and of human courage—not easily paralleled.

At Wednesbury, for example, there was a whole cycle of persecution, which stretched from June 1743 to February 1744. For these eight months the town was practically—so far as Methodists were concerned—under mob-rule. The magistrates and clergy conspired with the

rabble against Wesley's followers. They suffered almost as many wrongs as did the Jews at Kischineff, under Russian rule. They were plundered, beaten, hunted through the cities, and outraged almost at the pleasure of the mob. Wesley sums up the story:—

"Ever since June 20 last, the mob of Walsal, Darlaston, and Wednesbury, hired for that purpose by their betters, have broke open their poor neighbours' houses at their pleasure, by night and by day; extorted money from the few that had it; took away or destroyed their victuals and goods; beat and wounded their bodies; threatened their lives; abused their women (some in a manner too horrible to name), and openly declared they would destroy every Methodist in the country; the Christian country where his Majesty's innocent and loyal subjects have been so treated for eight months, and are now, by their wanton persecutors, publicly branded for rioters and incendiaries."

A favourite and very deadly trick was to seize and impress for the Army or Navy the more active of Wesley's followers and preachers. The story of Thomas Beard deserves to be told as it stands in Wesley's Journal:—

"I left Newcastle, and in the afternoon met John Nelson, at Durham, with Thomas Beard; another quiet and peaceable man, who had lately been torn from his trade, and wife, and children, and sent away as a soldier; that is, banished from all that was near and dear to him, and constrained to dwell among lions, for no other crime, either committed or pretended, than that of calling sinners to repentance. But his soul was in nothing terrified by his adversaries. Yet the body, after a while, sunk under its burden. He was then lodged in the hospital, at Newcastle, where he still praised God continually. His fever increasing, he was let blood. His arm festered, mortified, and was cut off; two or three days after which God signed his discharge, and called him up to his eternal home."

Of Wesley's personal experiences some examples deserve to be given:—

"I made haste to Goston's-green, near Birmingham, where I had appointed to preach at six. But it was dangerous for any who stood to hear, for the stones and dirt were flying from every side, almost without intermission, for near an hour. However,

very few persons went away. I afterwards met the Society and exhorted them, in spite of men and devils, to continue in the grace of God."

A still more exciting experience awaited him a little after at Falmouth:—

"I rode to Falmouth. Almost as soon as I was set down the house was beset on all sides by an innumerable multitude of people. A louder or more confused noise could hardly be at the taking of a city. The rabble roared with all their throats, 'Bring out the Canorum. Where is the Canorum?' (an unmeaning word which the Cornish generally use instead of 'Methodist'). No answer being given, they quickly forced open the outer door and filled the passage. Only a wainscot partition was between us, which was not likely to stand long. I immediately took down a large looking-glass which hung against it, supposing the whole side would fall in at once. When they began their work, with abundance of bitter imprecations, poor Kitty was utterly astonished and cried out 'O, sir, what must we do?' I said, 'We must pray.' Indeed at that time, to all appearances, our lives were not worth an hour's purchase. She asked, 'But, sir, is it not better for you to hide yourself, to get into the closet?' I answered, 'No; it is best for me to stand just where I am.' Among those without were the crews of some privateers which were lately come into the harbour. Some of these, being angry at the slowness of the rest, thrust them away, and coming up all together set their shoulders to the inner door, and cried out, 'Avast, lads, avast.' Away went all the hinges at once and the door fell back into the room. I stepped forward at once into the midst of them and said, 'Here I am. Which of you has anything to say to me? To which of you have I done any wrong? To you? or you? or you?' I continued speaking till I came, bareheaded as I was (for I purposely left my hat that they might all see my face), into the middle of the street, and then, raising my voice, said, 'Neighbours, countrymen, do you desire to hear me speak?' They cried, vehemently, 'Yes, yes. He shall speak. He shall. Nobody shall hinder him.'

"I never saw before—no, not at Walsal itself—the hand of God so plainly shown as here. There I had many companions who were willing to die with me, here not a friend but one simple girl, who, likewise, was hurried away from me in an instant, as soon as ever she came out of Mrs. B——'s door. There I received some blows, lost part of my clothes, and was covered over with dirt. Here, although the hands of perhaps some hundreds of people were

lifted up to strike or throw, yet they were one and all stopped in the midway, so that not a man touched me with one of his fingers, neither was anything thrown, from first to last, so that I had not even a speck of dirt on my clothes. Who can deny that God heareth the prayer, or that He hath all power in heaven and earth?"

Under such conditions as these Wesley still pressed on, with unresting swiftness, in his great work. The area of his labours widened. He went north to Scotland, making no less than twenty-one tours through Scottish towns and villages. He crossed St. George's Channel forty-two times, and put the impress of his strong personality and ardent zeal on Ireland. He drew comrades to his side, found helpers and preachers amongst his converts, and became not a solitary combatant, but the general of an army. And the business of preaching—constant in strain, vast in scale, and intense in ardour as this was—formed only part of Wesley's work. Side by side with these preaching tours is an unbroken chain of other forms of work. Great controversies, to be described hereafter, rose, ran their course, and died; persecutions were endured and forgotten; churches were built. A thousand wild scandals broke on Wesley himself. His friends fell from him, his comrades often proved faithless. He was pelted by the crowds, sneered at by the educated, frowned on by the clergy, and not seldom the very men who were plucked from sin and death turned against him. His brother Charles married a well-to-do wife, and gathered about himself the comforts of a settled home. Whitefield was absorbed in his orphanage scheme in America.

The one steadfast, unshakable soul who never doubted, never faltered, never grew discouraged, was Wesley! He was an Itinerant Apostle almost to the hour of his death. And he stamped the characteristics of his own life for all time on the Church he founded. It is the Church of an itinerant ministry.

Later, Wesley's work took a new shape—a shape more wearisome than even his interminable journeys—and infinitely more distressing. False doctrines crept in among his followers; strange forms of immorality manifested themselves; spiritual life grew faint. During the latter years of his apostolate Wesley was incessantly

"purging" his Societies, casting out unworthy members and enforcing wholesome discipline. He was, in a word, building a Church without knowing it or intending it. And, through all the dust and tumult of his preaching tours, who watches can see the lines of a great Church emerging, as will be described later. It is a Church not shaped in the calm of a philosopher's study, but in the fires of conflict and controversy. Each new feature of the great structure is wrought at the bidding of necessity, and to meet some visible and urgent need. It is tested by the stern and hard logic of facts.

And when the tale of Wesley's work as an itinerant preacher has been told, great spaces in his life are still left untouched and undescribed. He was a student, an administrator, the general of a great campaign, as well as a preacher; and if he had been none of these, his mere correspondence, his reading, his literary productions, were sufficient to fill to the brim any ordinary human life. But when all these separate forms of industry—as preacher, student, traveller, administrator, controversialist, writer—are crowded into the tiny curve of one little human life the sum-total of energy they represent is nothing less than amazing.

How did he do it? He wrote, he read, he corresponded, he preached; he was the unordained bishop of a great spiritual flock. He was always in the saddle or in the pulpit—and he was never in a hurry! What was his secret?

The truth is his toils as a preacher were interspaced with frequent islets of leisure. This man, who seemed to live in crowds, had yet in his life wide spaces of solitude. He preached to his five-o'clock-in-the-morning congregation, then mounted his horse, or stepped into his chaise, and rode or drove off to the next gathering. Betwixt the two crowds he had hours of solitude—to think, to read, to plan. He was the master, it may be added, of the perilous art of reading on horseback. His work itself was a physical tonic. Preaching at five o'clock in the morning may, perhaps, seem an heroic form of diligence; as a matter of fact Wesley proved it to be the most healthy variety of physical exercise! Preaching in the open-air, with the free winds of heaven about him, was—looked

at from the physical side—a very wholesome form of gymnastics.

These open-air preachings find their best record in Wesley's Journal. The famous Journal consists in the main of brief notes of sermons and texts, with tiny, swift vignettes of the crowds that listened to them—their size, their behaviour, the manner in which the discourse affected them, &c. These accounts are curiously condensed and vivid. They are written, so to speak, in mental as well as literal shorthand. Wesley sees his crowd for a moment, compresses the story of the sermon and its results into a sentence, adds a pious wish for a blessing, and then hurries on to the next crowd with abrupt haste. And that note of hurrying speed, that breathless economy of description, is characteristic of the whole Journal. Then come, thrust in betwixt these notes of sermons and texts and crowds, stories of strange conversions, of puzzling spiritual experiences, of odd characters met and of odd talks with them, with notes on books, scenery, events.

One does not easily realise, as the eye runs over these compressed and breathless sentences, what intense toil lies behind them. To talk to a crowd of 5000 people—few living speakers know what that means: the expenditure of nervous force, the strain on throat and brain, on body and soul. But Wesley did this, not only every day, but often twice and three times in a day. He did it for fifty years, and the strain did not kill him!

Gladstone's Midlothian campaign in 1879 is famous in history; but it was confined to a little patch of Scotland; it lasted fifteen days, and represented perhaps twenty speeches. But Wesley carried on his campaign on a scale which leaves Mr. Gladstone's performances dwarfed into insignificance. He did it on the great stage of the three kingdoms, and he maintained it without a break for more than fifty years!

Mr. Gladstone, at Gravesend, in 1871, spoke for two hours to an audience of 20,000, and Mr. John Morley, his astonished biographer, declares the speech to be, both physically and intellectually, the greatest achievement of Mr. Gladstone's career. But for Wesley to address audiences as vast, and in circumstances as trying, was an ordinary experience, and one which was repeated

incessantly to extreme old age. Gladstone was sixty-two years old when he delivered his Gravesend speech. When Wesley was of the same age his Journal is packed with records like this:—"Sunday, August 10, 1766. After prayers had been read in the church, preached in the churchyard to a large congregation; at 1 P.M. to 20,000; and between five and six to another such congregation. This was the hardest day's work I have had since I left London, being obliged to speak at each place from the beginning to the end at the utmost stretch of my voice. But my strength was as my day."

Seven years later (August 23, 1773) he records:—"Preached at Gwennap pit to above 32,000, the largest assembly I ever preached to, perhaps the first time that a man of seventy had been heard by 30,000 persons at once." Wesley's voice, it may be added, must have far outranged Gladstone's. He writes in his Journal, under date April 5, 1752:—"About one I preached at Bristol. Observing that several sat on the opposite side of the hill, I afterwards asked one to measure the ground, and we found that it was seven score yards from where I stood, yet the people heard perfectly. I did not think any human voice could have reached so far."

It is no exaggeration to say that Wesley preached more sermons, rode more miles, worked more hours, printed more books, and influenced more lives than any other Englishman of his age, or perhaps of any age. And the performance did not even tire him! In 1776 he writes: "I am seventy-three years old, and far abler to preach than I was at twenty-three." Ten years later this amazing old man writes, "I have entered into the eighty-third year of my age. I am a wonder to myself. I am never tired, either with preaching, writing, or travelling."

In his addresses to crowds, it must be remembered, Wesley was dealing with the most awful themes; he roused the deepest emotions of his hearers. And when he had lifted one vast multitude of men and women up to some high and intense mood of religious feeling he passed from it to hurry to some other crowd and worked the same miracle there. He himself maintained a strange calm—a calm which represented the equipoise of great emotions, not their absence—through all these services.

But the emotions which his words kindled in the listening multitudes were often of tremendous intensity. He was somehow the instrument and channel of strange forces. He would hold a vast multitude of English peasants and artisans in fixed, unbreathing, and almost awful stillness. Suddenly a wave of overpowering feeling would sweep over his hearers, and men would fall as if suddenly struck by a thunderbolt under his words Often he records that while preaching he had to stop to sing or pray, to allow the emotions of his hearers to express themselves. He gives many instances of the effect—instant, visible, and dramatic—of his sermons.

For the gathering of these crowds Wesley employed none of the familiar modern devices. There were no advertisements, no local committees, no friendly newspapers, no attractions of great choirs. It is a puzzle still to know how the crowds were induced to assemble, for Wesley gives no hints of any organisation employed. His hearers seemed to wait for him, to spring up before him as if at the signal of some mysterious whisper coming out of space. Wesley's familiar habit was to preach every morning at five o'clock, and he was often awakened long before that hour by the voices, sometimes by the hymns, of the multitude already gathered. How did he succeed in gathering in the grey dawn, and often while the stars yet hung pale in the sky, such crowds to listen to him?

Who reads Wesley's Journals and Letters during this period finds in them one most significant change. Something has dropped suddenly out of Wesley's life. The old, ever-gnawing self-discontent — the weariness, the bitter self-judgments, the sigh of defeated longings—all are gone! These for fourteen years had made up his "religion." Now everything is changed. Here is a man who has attained certainty. Religion for him is not an aspiration. It is an attainment. He is a man of lowlier spirit than ever; and yet linked to the humility of a child is the exultant confidence of a great saint—the serene calm of a soul that has passed beyond conflict and attained victory. His serenity of temper, which no care could darken and no anxiety disturb, is nothing less than wonderful. If it seems to fail for a moment, it is only

for a moment, and to Wesley's own surprise. Thus he says:—

"I had often wondered at myself (and sometimes mentioned it to others) that ten thousand cares of various kinds were no more weight or burden to my mind than ten thousand hairs were to my head. Perhaps I began to ascribe something of this to my own strength. And thence it might be that on Sunday 13 strength was withheld and I felt what it was to be troubled about many things. One and another hurrying me continually, it seized upon my spirit more and more, till I found it absolutely necessary to fly for my life, and that without delay. So the next day, Monday 14, I took horse and rode away for Bristol. As soon as we came to the house at Bristol my soul was lightened of that insufferable weight which had lain upon my mind, more or less, for several days."

"A little more work," to this life so packed and crowded with work, was, as Wesley says in another passage in his Journal, a tonic that killed care!

What force was it which knitted a life divided amongst so many interests into unity; which gave to a single human will a resisting power as of hardened steel; and which made a fallible man a force so tremendous, and kept him at a level so high? The explanation lies in the spiritual realm. Wesley had mastered the central secret of Christianity. He lived, he thought, he preached, he wrote, he toiled, under the undivided empire of the august motives, the divine forces of religion.

# CHAPTER VII

## A NEW ORDER OF HELPERS

Wesley, even after his conversion, had all, or nearly all, the stubborn prejudices of a High Churchman; and amongst the most obstinate of these was the prejudice against a layman preaching. To touch that point, as he himself said, was to touch the apple of his eye. Only a duly ordained divine, linked by a chain of many-centuried ordinations to the Apostles themselves, had the right to stand in the pulpit and preach to his fellow-men. That a mere layman, ordained by nobody, should mount to that sacred eminence, and dare with secular lips to interpret Scripture to his fellow-men, seemed to Wesley nothing short of sacrilege. He felt, as he contemplated that spectacle, as a Jewish priest would have felt had he seen some one who did not belong to the tribe of Levi ministering at the altar. And yet—such is the satire of history—Wesley was destined to found a Church which employs more lay preachers, and employs them with greater effect and honour, than any other Church known to history!

It was the resistless compulsion of facts—always for him the highest form of logic—which vanquished Wesley's prejudices. His work took a range and scale which outran his powers. The fast-multiplying numbers of the converts made provision for their oversight imperative. He must have helpers and associates. At first a few clergymen of spiritual temper stood by him; but they were only few. The public opinion of their order, too, was against them. They were anchored to their parishes. They could not keep pace with the rush of Wesley's work and the tidal sweep of the great movement he represented. They grew, in fact, afraid of the movement and of the strange forces stirring in it. Those who hated the work drew comfort from the reflection that it hung—or seemed

to hang—on the slender thread of a solitary human life. Only a single pair of lips had to be silenced by weariness, or sickness, or death, and all the tumult of the revival would be hushed. When Wesley died, they believed, his work would disappear. He had no allies, and could have no successors. But Wesley wrote afterwards:—

"When they imagined they had effectually shut the door, and locked up every passage whereby any help could come to two or three preachers, weak in body as well as soul, who they might reasonably believe would, humanly speaking, wear themselves out in a short time; when they had gained their point, by securing (as they supposed) all the men of learning in the nation, He that sitteth in Heaven laughed them to scorn, and came upon them by a way they thought not of. Out of the stones He raised up those who should beget children to Abraham. We had no more foresight of this than you. Nay, we had the deepest prejudices against it, until we could not but own that God gave wisdom from above to these unlearned and ignorant men, so that the work of the Lord prospered in their hands, and sinners were daily converted to God."[1]

It was, in advance, one of the certainties of the revival that Wesley would draw about himself a body of helpers from amongst his own converts; yet it is almost amusing to note how grudgingly, and with what reluctant, not to say resisting, steps, he moved in this direction. But he was borne away by forces too strong to be resisted. The new and glad spiritual energies awakening in multitudes broke inevitably into speech. The attempt to keep them decorously inarticulate was vain.

After Whitefield had preached one afternoon at Islington Churchyard a layman named Bowers, in all the joy of his new-found spiritual life, stood up on the table when Whitefield had finished and began to address the crowd. All ecclesiastical sensibilities were fluttered by the spectacle. Charles Wesley, who was present, tried in vain to stop Bowers, and at last withdrew indignantly, by way of protest. The zeal of this too daring layman was inextinguishable. He attempted to preach afterwards in

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 307.

the streets of Oxford, was arrested by the beadles, and scourged with stern rebuke for his obstinately vocal tongue by Charles Wesley.

This volunteer orator, it may be conceded, needed to be suppressed; but Wesley was compelled to choose amongst his comrades men whom his shrewd eyes—and he had the eye of a great captain for fit instruments—saw to be prudent and trustworthy, as well as zealous and gifted, to watch over the converts in one place while he moved on to preach elsewhere. His helpers were in all cases volunteers. Thus, at the latter end of 1739 Wesley records: "A young man named Thomas Maxfield came and desired to help me as a son of the Gospel. Soon after came another, Thomas Richards, then a third, Thomas Westall. These, severally, desired to serve me as sons, as helpers, when and where I should direct." The names of these men deserve to live in history. They were the advance guard of a great and noble host.

But if Wesley took their help, he did it in very grudging measure, with plentiful doubts, and only on the avowed grounds of necessity. He could not forbid, he would not expressly sanction, and at first he satisfied himself with merely "permitting" lay preaching. But he did this with doubts, and doubts that looked both ways; doubts whether he ought to do so much, and also whether he ought not to do more.

"It is not clear to us (he says) that presbyters, so circumstanced as we are, may appoint or ordain others; but it is that we may direct, as well as suffer them to do, what we conceive they are moved to by the Holy Ghost. We think that they who are only called of God and not of man, have more right to preach than they who are only called of man and not of God. Now, that many of the clergy, though called of man, are not called of God to preach His Gospel is undeniable. First, because they themselves utterly disclaim, nay, ridicule the inward call; secondly, because they do not know what the Gospel is; of consequence they do not, and cannot preach it. That I have not gone too far yet, I know; but whether I have gone far enough, I am extremely doubtful. Soul-damning clergymen lay me under more difficulties than soul-saving laymen."[1]

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 307.

Wesley at first allowed his helpers to exhort, but rigorously forbade them to preach. They might expound the Scriptures; but they must not venture on the solemn business of delivering a "sermon." This, however, was obviously an arrangement which could not last. Who can decide the exact point at which an exhortation attains the awful dignity of a sermon? And why should an address which was legitimate, and even praiseworthy, as an exhortation, suddenly become a mere impiety, when identified as a sermon? Wesley was at Bristol when the tidings reached him that Maxfield, his earliest helper, whom he had left in London, was preaching. All the sacerdotalist in him—and there was much of sacerdotalism behind his long nose and beneath his flowing wig—took fire. He hastened to London, brooding as he went in angry alarm over this scandal. "John," said his wise mother when they met, "take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is as surely called by God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching and hear him for yourself."

His mother's words touched a very sensitive chord in Wesley's intellect and conscience. The "fruits of his preaching"! These were final! The sermon that converts men has written upon it the signature of God's approval. Wesley's prejudices were stubborn, but they always yielded to facts. He listened, watched, meditated, decided. "It is the Lord," he said, "let Him do what seemeth Him good."

Wesley quickly found another instance more striking and decisive than even that of Maxfield, where upon a layman's preaching was written, in characters visible to all men, the signature of God's approval and use. John Nelson, whose spiritual history is one of the romances of early Methodism, had been for some time exhorting his neighbours at Birstal. He says of himself at that time that "he would rather be hanged on a tree than go to preach." But the crowds that gathered about him and hung upon his words, and found in them a converting energy, drew him on; and Nelson, to his own alarm, found himself at last guilty of delivering a sermon. He wrote to Wesley begging for advice "how to carry on the work which God had begun by such an unpolished

tool as myself." Wesley accordingly went down to Birstal. "He sat down by my fireside," records Nelson, "in the very posture I dreamed about four months before, and spoke the same words I dreamed he spoke." Wesley found both preacher and congregation in Birstal raised up without his act or knowledge, and as he looked and listened he realised that the question of lay preaching was settled for all time. He recognised, indeed, in this new order of Christian workers springing up under his eyes the solution of a great problem.

What sort of men were these helpers who thus gathered round Wesley and gave range, continuity, and permanence to his work? Their story lies written in faded and well-nigh forgotten biographies. And from these ancient volumes their faces look out upon us with a curious effect. The art of the eighteenth century was very cruel to its subjects; and the portraits of Wesley's helpers, it must be confessed, are not seldom of an alarming quality. They are not often the faces of scholars. Sainthood has not yet had time to refine the coarse, strong features of the ploughman, or the stonemason, or the private soldier. Southey, describing the portrait of John Haime, gives a cruel category of his features: "Small, inexpressive eyes, scanty eyebrows, and a short, broad, vulgar nose, in a face of ordinary proportions, seem to mark out a subject who would have been content to travel a jog-trot along the high-road of mortality, and have looked for no greater delight than that of smoking and boozing in the chimney-corner. And yet John Haime passed his whole life in a continued spiritual ague."

But John Haime's "spiritual ague," with its alternations of fire and ice, of anxious dreads and exultant raptures, was, after all, infinitely nobler than the animal-like content in which the majority of his fellow-countrymen at that moment lived.

These men, for all their limitations, deserve to be counted among God's heroes. They had a touch of the divine patience, the courage which no terrors could shake, of the early Christian martyrs. They were saints like Francis of Assisi, dreamers like Bunyan. They had a perpetual vision of the spiritual world. To Bunyan "above Elstow Green was heaven, beneath was hell." And

Wesley's first preachers saw all men set betwixt such dread opposites. They had all the zeal of the preaching Friars of the Middle Ages, with a better theology than they and an infinitely nobler morality. Their speech was the channel of a power which lay beyond alike the comprehension or the analysis of reason. The more, indeed, their sneering critics emphasise the lowly birth, the scanty training, the untaught simplicity of these early Methodist preachers, the more wonderful becomes their work. What strange force was it that seized these untaught men, transfigured them, lifted them up to the height of great and sacred emotions, made them not merely orators who could sway crowds, but apostles who could save souls? For the great, perpetual miracle of Christianity, the miracle of making drunkards sober, thieves honest, and harlots chaste, was, somehow, wrought by the preaching of Wesley's helpers. It was wrought, indeed, on a scale which left the decorous and orderly ministry of the Church of that day utterly bankrupt!

The lives of the early Methodist preachers belong, alas! to the realm of forgotten literature; yet he who explores these dead biographies will find some strange and rich booty in them. They are written for the most part in homely English, the English of Bunyan or of Cobbett. They are rich in strange incidents, and in amazingly vivid portraits of strange characters. The story of John Nelson, for example, might be described as Bunyan's "Grace Abounding" translated into human terms once more.

Nelson was a typical Yorkshireman, strong-bodied, stubborn, rich in quaint humour and in homely common-sense, and rich, too, in the capacity for profound religious feeling. He had, as even Southey says, "as high a spirit and as brave a heart as ever Englishman was blessed with." The religious struggles through which he passed deserve to be classed with those of Bunyan or of Francis de Sales, and they are described with equal vividness. He had a stormy youth, and at thirty years of age records that, "rather than live another thirty years like those already passed, he would choose to be strangled." "Surely," said he, "God never made man to be such a riddle to himself, and to leave him so! There must be something in religion that I am unacquainted with, to

satisfy the empty mind of man, or he is in a worse state than the beasts that perish." He heard Whitefield, but that most mellifluous of all preachers did not suit the brooding nature of this stubborn Yorkshireman. Later he heard Wesley. "Oh," he says, "that was a blessed morning for my soul." His description of Wesley as a preacher is classic and has already been quoted.

In how heroic a temper Nelson took his religion can be imagined. He knew no half-measures. He carried his fearless spirit into his piety and rebuked sin in high or low. He was a stonemason, and was working at the time at the Exchequer, a royal building. He was required by his foreman to work on the Sabbath day, on the ground that it was the king's business, and even the Ten Commandments must yield to royalty. The honest Yorkshireman declared he would not work on the Sabbath for any man in England. "Religion," said the foreman, "has made you a rebel against the king." "No, sir," he replied, "it has made me a better subject than ever I was. The greatest enemies the king has are Sabbath-breakers, swearers, drunkards, and whoremongers, for these pull down God's judgments both upon king and country." He was told that he must lose his employment if he would not obey his orders; his answer was, "he would rather want bread than wilfully offend God." The foreman swore that he would be as mad as Whitefield if he went on.

"'What hast thou done,' said he, 'that thou needst make so much ado about salvation? I always took thee to be as honest a man as any I have in the work, and could have trusted thee with five hundred pounds.' 'So you might,' answered Nelson, 'and not have lost one penny by me.' 'I have a worse opinion of thee now,' said the foreman. 'Master,' he replied, 'I have the odds of you; for I have a much worse opinion of myself than you can have.'"

Nelson's zeal was of so ardent a type that out of his scanty earnings he actually hired one of his fellow-workmen to go to hear Wesley preach, and so give his soul a chance. Religion shot through with gleams of poetry the untaught imagination of this Yorkshire mason; and describing his own feelings he says, "My soul seemed to

breathe its life in God as naturally as my body breathed life in the common air." The vicar of Birstal, where Nelson lived, by way of suppressing this inconveniently earnest Christian, had him pressed for a soldier, in defiance of the law, and the story of what he suffered sheds a curious light on the social condition of England in that day.

As a pressed man, Nelson was marched through York, where his reputation as one of these new, fanatical, and much-hated Methodists was well known. It was, says Nelson, "as if hell were removed from beneath to meet me at my coming. The streets and windows were filled with people, who shouted and huzzaed as if I had been one that had laid waste the nation. But the Lord made my brow like brass, so that I could look on them as grasshoppers, and pass through the city as if there had been none in it but God and myself." Nelson, though forced into the ranks, still held that a red coat did not discharge him from his obligations as a preacher, and he rebuked his astonished officers to their face for their oaths. An uncomfortable soldier this! One youthful ensign set himself to suppress this strange recruit, and showed much ingenuity in inventing insults and cruelties to be expended upon him. At this stage of his story the mere unregenerate Yorkshireman emerges for a moment in honest John's autobiography.

"'It caused a sore temptation to arise in me,' he says, 'to think that an ignorant, wicked man should thus torment me—and I able to tie his head and heels together! I found an old man's bone in me!'"

Nelson obtained his discharge at last through the influence of Lady Huntingdon, but his story is as moving a bit of English as there is to be found in the literature of the eighteenth century. And the lives of many of these preachers are rich in such stories, heroic, pathetic, sometimes absurd, but with a gleam of nobility running through their simplest performances.

Alexander Mather, for example, had by virtue of his Scottish blood a toughness of body and a certain fierce energy of industry that to an ordinary man might well seem incredible. He was a baker, working hours which

the modern temper would find intolerable, yet he found time to be one of Wesley's most effective helpers:—

"I had no time for preaching but what I took from my sleep, so that I frequently had not eight hours' sleep in a week. This, with hard labour, constant abstemiousness, and frequent fasting, brought me so low that my master was often afraid I should kill myself, and perhaps his fear was not groundless. I frequently put off my shirts as wet with sweat as if they had been dipped in water. After hastening to finish my business abroad, I have come home all in a sweat in the evening, changed my clothes, and ran to preach at one or another chapel, then walked or ran back, changed my clothes, and gone to work at ten, wrought hard all night, and preached at five the next morning. I ran back to draw the bread at a quarter or half-an-hour past six, wrought hard in the bake-house till eight, then hurried about with bread till the afternoon, and perhaps at night set off again."

Another of Wesley's helpers, Thomas Olivers, was a Welshman, with all the qualities of the Welsh temperament, its fervour, its simplicity, its gleam of poetry, its capacity for sudden anger. Describing his own spiritual condition after conversion, he says—"I truly lived by faith. I saw God in everything—the heavens, the earth and all therein showed me something of Him—yea, even from a drop of water, a blade of grass, or a grain of sand I often received instruction."

Of Olivers's emotional susceptibilities many striking amusing illustrations are given. While he was dining one day about noon a thought came over him that he was not called to preach. The food which then lay before him did not belong to him, and he was a thief and a robber in eating it. He burst into tears and could eat no more; and, having to officiate at one o'clock, went to the preaching-house, weeping all the way. He went weeping into the pulpit, and wept sorely while he gave out the hymn, while he prayed, and while he preached. A sympathetic emotion naturally spread through the congregation; many of them "cried aloud for the disquietness of their souls."

Wesley proved an ideal captain for these ecclesiastical irregulars. They were his spiritual children, as well as his helpers. His government over them had in it a

fatherly strain; and yet he enforced upon them a discipline of an almost heroic pitch. They were soldiers on a campaign, and there is more than a touch of military severity in the rules enforced upon them. These rules descend to the homeliest details of food, dress, manners, hours of sleep, methods of work, and general conduct. Never did a body of men work more diligently, fare harder, and receive smaller pay in earthly coin than did this first generation of Methodist preachers. "Never be unemployed, never be triflingly employed," was Wesley's rule for them—a rule which was but the reflex of his own practice.

Wesley's care for his preachers was not unqualified by an ample knowledge of the weakness of human nature. Here are some of his regulations:—

"Be serious; let your motto be, Holiness to the Lord. Avoid all lightness as you would avoid hell-fire, and trifling as you would cursing and swearing. Touch no woman; be as loving as you will, but the custom of the country is nothing to us. Take money of no one; if they give you food when you are hungry, and clothes when you want them, it is enough; but not silver or gold; let there be no pretence for any one to say we grow rich by the Gospel."

The thoroughness with which Wesley investigated and regulated the domestic habits of his preachers, finds many entertaining illustrations.

"'Do you,' said he, 'deny yourselves every useless pleasure of sense, imagination, honour? Are you temperate in all things? To take one instance—in food, do you use only that kind, and that degree, which is best both for the body and soul? Do you see the necessity of this? Do you eat no flesh suppers? No late suppers? These naturally tend to destroy bodily health. Do you eat only three times a day? If four, are you not an excellent pattern to the flock! Do you take no more food than is necessary at each meal? You may know, if you do, by a load at your stomach; by drowsiness or heaviness; and, in a while, by weak or bad nerves. Do you use only that kind, and that degree, of drink which is best both for your body and soul? Do you drink water? Why not? Did you ever? Why did you leave it off, if not for health? When will you begin again? To-day? How often do you drink wine or ale? Every day? Do you want or waste it?'"

He declared his own purpose, of eating only vegetables on Fridays, and taking only toast and water in the morning; and he expected the preachers to observe the same kind of fast.

Wesley was so much in advance of his age as to understand the educational power of the Press, and he used his preachers, systematically, as its vehicle. No preacher was to make any personal excursion into authorship without Wesley's consent; but a parcel of the books Wesley himself published was part of the travelling equipment of every itinerant. "Carry them with you," said Wesley, "through every town. Exert yourselves in this. Be not ashamed; be not weary; leave no stone unturned."

The itinerancy of Wesley's helpers was, at first, of a very active sort. A preacher, he thought, would exhaust his message to any one community in seven or eight weeks. After that period, Wesley argued, "neither can he find matter for preaching every morning and evening, nor will people come to hear him; hence, he grows cold by lying in bed, and so do the people. Whereas, if he never stays more than a fortnight in one place, he will find matter enough, and the people will gladly hear him." "I know," says Wesley frankly, "were I to preach one whole year in one place, I should preach both myself and my congregation to sleep."

Wesley, with a wise benevolence for both preachers and congregations, insisted that his helpers should preach short sermons. One of his regulations, indeed, might with great advantage be painted in golden characters on every church in the world to-day. His preachers were enjoined "to begin and end always precisely at the time appointed, and always to conclude the service in about an hour; to suit their subject to the audience; to choose the plainest text, and keep close to the text; neither rambling from it, nor allegorising, nor spiritualising too much." They were not to be vociferous.

"'Scream no more,' Wesley wrote to one of his helpers, 'at the peril of your soul. God now warns you, by me, whom He has set over you, speak with all your heart, but with moderate voice. I often speak loud, often vehemently, but I never scream; I never strain myself. I dare not. I know it to be a sin against God and my own soul.'"

There is assuredly the salt of common-sense in all this. When before in history, indeed, was there such a combination of zeal, which, by its mere temperature, suggests fanaticism, linked to so much of cool-eyed sanity, and of practical sense!

Southey says, scornfully, of these early preachers, that "they possessed no other qualification as teachers than a good stock of animal spirits and a ready flow of words, a talent which, of all others, is least connected with sound intellect." But this is one of the many passages in his "Life of Wesley" in which Southey's prejudices blind him to facts. These men were, no doubt, as one of them describes himself, "brown-bread preachers." But at least they knew, and knew well, and by that surest form of knowledge—the knowledge born of verified experience—all they taught. Wesley says, energetically, of them: "In the one thing, which they profess to know, they are not ignorant men. I trust there is not one of them who is not able to go through such an examination in substantial, practical, experimental divinity as few of our candidates for holy orders, even in the University (I speak it with sorrow and shame, and in tender love), are able to do."[1]

Wesley himself, however, had a scholar's hate of ignorance, and he toiled with almost amusing diligence to educate his helpers. He insisted that they should be readers, and scourged them with a very sharp whip if he found them neglecting their books. Thus he writes to one:—

"Your talent in preaching does not increase. It is just the same as it was seven years ago. It is lively, but not deep. There is little variety; there is no compass of thought. Reading only can supply this, with daily meditation and daily prayer. You wrong yourself greatly by omitting this. You can never be a deep preacher without it, any more than a thorough Christian. Oh, begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not. What is tedious at first will afterwards be pleasant. Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life! There is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days, and a pretty, superficial preacher. Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow; do not starve yourself any longer."

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 310.

Wesley was wisely anxious as to the pulpit style of his helpers, and the chief of all pulpit virtues, of the literary sort, he held to be clearness.

"'Clearness,' he writes to one of his lay-assistants, 'is necessary for you and me, because we are to instruct people of the lowest understanding. Therefore we, above all, if we think with the wise, must yet speak with the vulgar. We should constantly use the most common, little, easy words (so they are pure and proper) which our language affords. When first I talked at Oxford to plain people, in the castle of the town, I observed they gaped and stared. This quickly obliged me to alter my style, and adopt the language of those I spoke to; and yet there is a dignity in their simplicity which is not disagreeable to those of the highest rank.'"

These early Methodist preachers, if they did not know much of "high thinking," at least had an abundant experience of plain living. Wesley proposed that Mather should go with him on a preaching tour in Ireland, and he was asked how much he thought would be sufficient for the support of his wife during his absence. Mather fixed the sum at the modest rate of 4s. a week, and this was counted excessive! The wife of a Methodist helper in those heroic days must have been of an even more frugal mind than John Gilpin's wife, sung by Cowper. The helper, when on a preaching tour, was expected to find his food amongst those who heard him. When he was at home, his wife was allowed 1s. 6d. a day for his board, with the understanding that whenever her husband was invited out for a meal the price of that meal was to be deducted from the 1s. 6d. The wife's allowance was 4s. a week, with the further allowance of £1 a quarter for each child.

At the ninth Conference, held in October 1752, at Bristol, it was agreed that the preachers should receive a stipend of £12 per annum, in order to provide themselves with necessaries. Their list of "necessaries" must have been of Spartan brevity. But more than twelve years afterwards, at the Conference of 1765, a deputation from the York circuit was admitted and allowed to plead against the "large sum of £12 a year"! Before 1752, each circuit made its own financial arrangements with the preachers, and sometimes they were of a quaint order.

As late as 1764, the practice in the Norwich circuit, for example, was to divide the love-feast money among the preachers, and "this," says Myles, with a certain accent of melancholy, "was very little indeed."

When before in history was there such an inexpensive order of preachers as these early helpers of Wesley? They laid up much treasure in heaven, but had very empty pockets on earth. One of them, John Jane, died at Epworth. His entire wardrobe was insufficient to pay his funeral expenses, which amounted to £1, 17s. 3d. All the money he possessed was 1s. 4d., "enough," records Wesley briefly, "for any unmarried preacher of the Gospel to leave to his executors."

Many of these early preachers, it is true, sooner or later failed Wesley. They settled down to the charge of dissenting congregations, or they accepted orders in the Anglican Church. Some were swept away by one theological craze or another. Many excuses are to be made for them. Their position was undefined; their place in the great movement unsettled. They did the work of ministers without having as yet any claim to the ministerial office. But the part they played in Wesley's movement can hardly be exaggerated. The Methodist ministry of to-day comes by direct descent from them. Out of them, too, has grown the great order of lay preachers, without which Methodism itself could not exist.

For every Methodist minister in the world to-day there are, roughly speaking, ten lay preachers; and out of every seven sermons preached in Methodist pulpits every Sunday, six are preached by the lips of laymen. Every minister who stands in a Methodist pulpit has passed through this order. The great sign and pledge of the non-sacerdotal character of Methodism is found in two facts. Its ministers share their preaching office with the lay preachers, and their pastoral office with the leaders.

# CHAPTER VIII

## HOW THE NEW CONVERTS WERE SHELTERED

Converts were now multiplying fast; they had grown to the scale of an army, and a new and most perplexing problem was born of Wesley's very success. How was he to watch over his converts? They had the untaught simplicity of children; they were scattered over a vast area; the spiritual atmosphere about them was ungenial. The clergy, their natural shepherds, had towards them too often the temper of wolves. They treated them as outcasts and drove them from the sacramental table. The converts looked to Wesley as their spiritual leader; yet how could he, an evangelist hurrying perpetually on to preach to new crowds, keep in personal touch with the converts behind him? The most difficult problem of the whole revival had to be solved, and on its solution depended the permanency of Wesley's work.

It is, therefore, with something of the joy of discovery, the accent of a spiritual Archimedes crying "Eureka," that, amid the hurry of his work and the fast-multiplying crowds of his converts, Wesley catches his first vision of the class-meeting, and sees of what uses it is capable. "This," he cries, "is the thing; the very thing that we have wanted so long."

Yet Wesley's note of surprised gladness is not a little puzzling. A religious society of some sort is a constant and familiar feature of his whole history up to this date. While he was yet a student at Oxford, he records in his Journal how some "serious man," otherwise nameless, said to him, "You must find companions or make them; the Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion." And certainly Wesley, with some wise, dumb instinct, always gave to his religion a social form. He founded one society at Oxford; established another on board the ship that took him to America; organised a third as soon as he got

to Savannah, and betook himself to the Moravian society in London directly he landed in England. He dates his religious almanac, indeed, by the various societies that came into existence; the society at Oxford in 1729, in Savannah in 1736, in London in 1739, &c. It was in the little society in Aldersgate Street that Wesley himself was converted. And Wesley not only organised new societies, but gladly availed himself of those which existed.

Societies within the Church came into existence long before Methodism. They make their appearance in the dissolute times that followed the Restoration, and represent an attempt on the part of the Christian conscience of that day to organise itself, if only in self-defence, against the shameless vice by which all decency was affronted, and the jesting unbelief which threatened to destroy religion. In Woodward's account of these societies we have, says Miss Wedgwood, "an exact description of a Methodist class-meeting, written four years before Wesley was born." But that is a somewhat wild over-statement. These early societies lacked the essentially spiritual elements of the class-meeting.

The Moravians, too, planted their little societies here and there on English soil, or captured those which already existed. So it is true, though it is only half the truth, that Wesley did not invent religious societies in England. But he gave those which existed a new form; he charged them with a new office. The religious societies Woodward describes were tiny nurseries of morals. The Moravian societies were, or became, mere centres of quietism. The Methodist society, in its final form—the class-meeting—is something profoundly different.

Wesley, of course, found the great principle of religious fellowship in active operation in the Apostolic Church. In his class-meetings he merely organised that principle afresh, translated it into new terms, and made it a permanent element and condition of church life. And in doing this he was faithful to the highest ideals of church order.

There are two possible theories of church relationship. One is what may be called the tram-car theory. Here is an accidental group of people who sit side by side for a few moments, who are going in the same direction, are

impelled by the same forces, and cared for by the same agencies. But they are strangers to each other. They have no common language. No articulate or conscious kinship links them together. "Society," except in the mechanical—or, say, the geographical—sense, does not exist betwixt them.

Then there is what may be called the family theory of the Church. Here is a circle of human beings knitted together by conscious and acknowledged kinship. They talk a common language. They have common joys and sorrows and perils. They have offices of help and protection towards each other; what touches one is felt by all. Which of these two conceptions of church membership—that of the tram-car, or that of the fireside—comes nearest to God's ideal it is needless to say.

No such household fellowship existed in the Church of that day, and this was one of the secrets of its decay. Southey, describing a stage in John Nelson's history, says that "a judicious minister who should have known the man could have given him the teaching he needed. But," he adds, with unconscious severity, "the sort of intercourse between a pastor and his people which this would imply hardly exists anywhere, and cannot possibly exist in the metropolis." Coleridge, on this, breaks out in a pregnant footnote. "Is this true?" he asks; "and can a Church of which it is true be a Church of Christ?" Wesley, who knew the Church of his day well, says of it: "Look east, west, north, or south, name what parish you please, is Christian fellowship there? Rather, are not the bulk of the parishioners a mere rope of sand? What Christian connection is there between them? What intercourse in spiritual things? What watching over each other's souls?"

But if in the Church of that day there was little direct fellowship betwixt the minister and his hearers, still less was there betwixt the hearers themselves. The Church had lost—perhaps it never possessed—one of its noblest functions, the unifying office betwixt men and women of all ranks. And Wesley was supplying what is one of the primitive and imperishable necessities of Christian life in every age, and under all conditions, when, in the shape of his societies—and later of the class-meeting—

he erected fellowship into a permanent feature of Church life.

It is curious to note how, by what might almost be called accident—by the mere compulsion of events, and not by conscious plan—the Methodist societies came into existence. Wesley founded the society which afterwards met in Fetter Lane on Böhler's advice. But, in 1738, after the separation from the Moravians, the Foundry became the centre of his work. "At the latter end of 1739," he records, "from eight to ten persons came to me in London who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin. They desired that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come." Wesley fixed Thursday evening for this purpose. The numbers grew fast. "The first evening about twelve persons came, the next week thirty or forty. These grew to a hundred; and then," says Wesley, "I took down their names and places of abode, intending to call upon them in their homes. Thus," he adds, "without any previous plan, began the Methodist society in England—a company of people associated together to help each other, to work out their own salvation." A similar society was formed at Bristol, and later at other places.

Here, then, was the Methodist society, but not yet the Methodist class-meeting. This did not emerge till 1742, three years later; and it was an effort to clear off the first of Methodist Church debts which yielded the class-meeting.

On the meeting-house at Bristol was a considerable debt, and the members of the society were consulting how it should be paid. One, Captain Foy, whose name deserves to live, stood up and said, "Let every member of the society give a penny a week, till the debt is paid." Another answered, "Many of them are poor, and cannot afford to do it." "Then," said the first speaker, "put eleven of the poorest with me; and if they can give anything, well; I will call on them weekly; and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself. And each of you call on eleven of your neighbours weekly; receive what they give, and make up what is wanting." It was done; and the plan was quickly discovered to yield more than pence. "In a while," writes Wesley, "some of

these informed me, they found such and such an one did not live as he ought. It struck me immediately, 'This is the thing, the very thing, we have wanted so long.'" Here was the suggestion of an oversight far-stretching and yet minute; the most effective pastorate the wit of man has yet devised or the grace of God used.

Wesley's instinct of thoroughness, his habit of following out a hint till it became an institution, came at once into play. The class-meeting was systematised; it was made co-extensive with the revival. His trained and scholarly mind ran through all history in search of precedents and details, and these he found in abundance. So dispassionate a witness as Paley found in the mode of life, its form and habit, of the early Christian Church, "a close resemblance to the Unitas Fratrum and to the modern Methodists." The tesseræ, the symbols of membership in the Apostolic Church, were reproduced in the familiar "ticket," the sign of membership in the Methodist Church.

The value of the societies — especially in their later form of the class-meeting—was simply measureless. They gave the revival coherence; they nourished its vitality. Each new convert brought into the class-meeting found himself one of a group bound by great emotions held in common—sorrow for sin, joy in pardon, the consciousness of a new life, a common passion for the salvation of others, a common aspiration after higher attainments in Christian experience. He caught from the society the inspiration, and he found in it the safeguards, of companionship. The sheltering office of these societies was thus of inexpressible value. The mere chill of the secular world would have killed the new-born spiritual life of multitudes. The spell of ancient companionships would have asserted itself. But in the new companionships into which the converts were brought was found a counteracting energy.

Wesley quickly recognised in the class-meeting the most effective instrument of discipline a founder or the head of a Church could desire.

"'It can scarcely be conceived,' he says, 'what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had

not so much as an idea before. They began to bear one another's burdens and naturally to care for each other. Evil men were detected and reproved. They were borne with for a season; if they forsook their sins we received them gladly; if they obstinately persisted therein it was openly declared that they were not of us.'"

Each class had a leader, and the leaders' meeting became the disciplinary court in the Church. The ticket which was the symbol of membership was renewed every three months during a personal visitation of each class by Wesley himself or by one of his helpers. The simple withholding of the ticket broke the tie of membership and excluded the unworthy; and Wesley, who with a wise instinct put efficiency before bulk, purged his classes in this way year by year with unshrinking thoroughness.

What Methodism has gained in every land and throughout its whole history from the class-meeting can hardly be expressed in words. The device gives range, continuity, and permanence to the pastoral work of the Church. And for a Church with an itinerant ministry such an organisation is imperative. Without it no effective pastorate can exist. This great institution not only influenced Wesley's work profoundly while he lived, it has left a deep and permanent mark on Methodism itself. The class-meeting gives religion speech; it slays that dumb and obstinate shyness about spiritual things which lies like some chilling frost on so many good people. If Methodism has developed in its laity gifts of speech, of prayer, and of service beyond most Churches, it is due to the class-meeting. And the stamp of the class-meeting is on the Methodist ministry itself. In the class-meeting each minister learns, so to speak, the grammar of his spiritual language. He brings from it a glow, a certainty, a strength which no other institution yields.

The class-meeting has its characteristic risks. It is not seldom discredited by want of elasticity and freshness in its conduct. But for Methodism itself it is a spiritual nerve-centre whence radiate a thousand spiritual forces. And it may be predicted with great, if melancholy, confidence that when the class-meeting dies Methodism itself, if it survives, will undergo some silent but profound and disastrous change. It will begin to ossify.

Forms will once again seem more than fact. The familiar and mournful cycle of change by which a great Church petrifies, and fits itself for being thrust aside by some new and more intensely spiritual agency, will have begun.

Just now, however, we are only concerned to note the contribution which his societies made to the success of Wesley's work during his lifetime, and the degree in which they as a consequence influenced England. The societies undoubtedly met and satisfied what was at the moment the special need of religion in England. Says Miss Wedgwood:—

> "The yearning for some common standing-ground broader than that of mere kinship, stronger than that of mere nationality, must be strong at every time; perhaps it was especially strong during the eighteenth century. A reaction from the work of the Reformation swept many at that time into Romanism, and collected many more into little societies cemented by a common interest in the things of eternity. But nowhere did this instinct meet with such absolute satisfaction as in the ranks of Methodism."

In Wesley's societies, to sum up, a new and far-stretching brotherhood came into existence. It spread like a living net over England. It linked men and women, parted from each other by the widest differences of education and social position, of wealth and poverty, into a common household. It bred a thousand kindly offices betwixt them. And as a contribution to the social life of England in that day these societies had a value never yet sufficiently recognised. It was not merely that they had the office of a salt in the blood of the body social; and that each little class-meeting was a centre of religious energies affecting everything within its reach. The classes were a brotherhood; a brotherhood woven of spiritual ties, and so made indestructible. And this brotherhood overleaped social barriers; it bridged separating gulfs betwixt classes. It made society not only purer, but closer and stronger. The social offices of religion are seldom adequately realised; and these offices never found a happier or more effective expression than in Wesley's societies.

# CHAPTER IX

## SOLDIER METHODISTS

A GREAT religious movement is, of course, misread if it is translated into merely personal terms. It resembles the stirring of a sea-tide. It is the result of planetary forces. It rises from unsounded deeps. It makes itself felt at widely distant points. It fills, with its sound and foam, at the same moment a hundred little bays. Certainly the great religious movement of the eighteenth century, though it has the Wesleys and Whitefield as its most commanding figures, extended far beyond their personal influence. It ran like some viewless contagion through the very air; and some of its developments, with which neither Whitefield nor the Wesleys had personally much to do, were of a remarkable character.

The forces of the great revival, for example, reached the army and produced there some very picturesque results. The British Army in Flanders is best known to the man in the street by the famous saying in "Tristram Shandy" describing its swearing performances. That unfortunate army, with the Duke of Cumberland for Commander-in-chief, marching and fighting beside strange allies, on foreign soil, and for a cause about which it knew little and cared less, was, no doubt, in very evil conditions. Religion amongst the Huguenots of Henry of Navarre, or Cromwell's Ironsides, or the sturdy Dutch Protestants of William of Orange, is thinkable. But who can imagine any of the tempers and emotions of religion breaking out spontaneously in the ill-led, hard-swearing, hard-drinking, hard-fighting British Army in Flanders in the days of Fontenoy and Dettingen! And yet the literature of Methodism gives us glimpses of the inner life of that army of which historians are unconscious, but which have amazing human interest.

In May 1744, for example, with Dettingen a year be-

hind and Fontenoy not quite a year in front, the British Army lay camped on the side of a hill near Brussels, and not far from Waterloo. One afternoon a cluster of red-coats set up a little flag on the hill-slope across the valley and began to sing. The soldiers came streaming from the camp and gathered round. A British private, the very type of his class—square-bodied, short-necked, with broad face, scanty eyebrows, and inexpressive eyes—began to preach. His voice carried far, but it was the voice of an untaught man. He talked in such English as a peasant might use, and which peasants would have understood, of sin and judgment, of Christ and His salvation. The crowd about him—war-battered soldiers, familiar with the hardships of the march, the roughness of camp life, the perils of the battle-line—hung breathlessly on his lips. They numbered some thousands; the sound of their singing filled the valley.

And this scene was repeated in British camps every day—sometimes twice, sometimes thrice a day! The preacher was John Haime, afterwards one of Wesley's helpers, and already, though he had not yet seen Wesley's face, one of the fruits of the great religious movement of which Wesley was the symbol.

Here, again, is a little battle vignette, taken from the bloody field of Fontenoy: Two Methodist soldiers meet each other in the darkness after the fight is over. They had both taken part in that long and bloody struggle on the road which runs betwixt Fontenoy and the wood of Barri. They had stood in the stubborn ranks, while scourged on front and flank by the French guns; they had fallen back at last with the broken but unconquerable fragments of the British column. Haime tells the story of how they fared in the battle:—

"When W. Clements had his arm broken by a musket-ball, they would have carried him out of the battle. But he said, 'No; I have an arm left to hold my sword. I will not go yet.' When a second shot broke his other arm he said, 'I am as happy as I can be out of paradise.' John Evans, having both his legs taken off by a cannon-ball, was laid across a cannon to die; where, as long as he could speak, he was praising God with joyful lips.

"For my own part I stood the hottest fire of the enemy for about seven hours. But I told my comrades, 'The French have no ball

that will kill me this day.' After about seven hours a cannon-ball killed my horse under me. An officer cried out aloud, 'Haime, where is your God now?' I answered, 'Sir, He is here with me, and He will bring me out of this battle.' Presently a cannon-ball took off his head. My horse fell upon me and some cried out, 'Haime is gone!' But I replied, 'He is not gone yet. . . .' I had a long way to go through all our horse, the balls flying on every side. And all the way lay multitudes bleeding, groaning, or just dead. Surely I was in the fiery furnace; but it did not singe a hair of my head. The hotter the battle grew, the more strength was given me. I was as full of joy as I could contain."

Then Haime tells how he meets his comrade in the confusion of the night, after the sound of the guns had died away:—

"As I was quitting the field I met one of our brethren with a little dish in his hand, seeking water. I did not know him at first, being covered with blood. He smiled and said, 'Brother Haime, I have got a sore wound.' I asked, 'Have you got Christ in your heart?' He said, 'I have, and I have had Him all this day. I have seen many good and glorious days, with much of God, but I never saw more of it than this day. Glory be to God for all His mercies!'"[1]

What stranger illustration of the supernatural power of religion can be imagined than that afforded by the picture of these two smoke-blackened soldiers, who, coming out of a great fight, tell each other how signally they have realised the comforting presence of God all through it!

The fashion in which the great revival affected the army, the material upon which it worked there, the phenomena it produced, are best illustrated by personal narrative. Wesley, who had a wise interest in religion as translated into the terms of personal experience, made his helpers write the story of their religious life, and published many of these in *The Arminian Magazine*, and amongst these are the biographies of some who had been soldiers. They are true human documents in the modern sense, marked with reality in every sentence, and as the records of actual human beings caught in the sweep of a great religious movement they are of real historical value.

As an example may be taken the story of Stanniforth,

[1] "Lives of Early Methodist Preachers," vol. i. p. 169.

who was a soldier till he was twenty-nine years of age, and a preacher of the Gospel under Wesley for fifty years afterwards.

It is hardly possible to imagine a rougher or more hopeless bit of humanity than Stanniforth in his younger days, as described by himself. The son of a Sheffield cutler — wild, sullen, untaught, ungrateful — he sinned grossly, and sinned without remorse. He had the appetites of an animal, and apparently no more moral sense than an animal. He drifted into soldiership, drawn by the charms of rough soldier companionship. In the story of his youth a mother's figure is dimly seen, who wept over her lawless son, hung round vile haunts to fetch the worthless lad home, mourned over his vices, bought him off, at the cost of all her little savings, when he had enlisted. "All this," records Stanniforth, "made not the least impression upon me. I felt no gratitude to either God or man." He re-enlisted, and marched off, leaving his broken-hearted mother weeping in the street; and Stanniforth, in his autobiography, adds one dreadful touch. "I was not only fierce and passionate, but also sullen and malicious without any feeling of humanity. Instead of weeping with my mother, I even rejoiced in her sorrow!"

Stanniforth's story gives us a grim picture of the brutal life, and of the brutal vices, of a British soldier in the eighteenth century. He was of a wild and stubborn spirit, familiar with the military prison and the cruel military punishments of that day; and more than once narrowly escaped being shot off-hand for breaches of soldierly duty. In 1743 his regiment sailed for Flanders and joined the army a few days after the battle of Dettingen. If the British Army of Flanders swore terribly in those days, Private Stanniforth certainly contributed more than his personal share to its exercises in blasphemy. The far-off and broken-hearted mother sent him sorrowful letters, and little gifts of her hard-earned savings; but this drunken, plundering, blaspheming private had no touch of gratitude for her love.

At this stage Stanniforth made the acquaintance of another private, a lad from Barnard Castle, named Mark Bond, who was in every detail of training, character, and temper the exact opposite of Stanniforth. But betwixt

the two there sprang up a friendship of the antique sort, and such as cannot be easily paralleled. Bond and Stanniforth were simply Damon and Pythias translated into the eighteenth century, and transformed into British privates. Bond's story was very simple. He was the son of godly parents and feared God from three years old. As a child he was assailed with strange and terrible temptations. He was, in Stanniforth's words, "violently and continually importuned to curse God"; and one fatal day, when he was not yet seven years old, he went into a field, crept under the hedge, and with his childish lips whispered the dreadful words—words which, to his boyish conscience, sealed his doom, and which certainly blackened his life for many years to come. Where did this child of seven learn anything about "blaspheming God"? He kept his dreadful secret; concluded his perdition was certain, and carried an almost broken heart about with him. At eighteen he enlisted with the hope that he would be soon killed! Soldiership was for him a circuitous form of suicide. This sad-faced private, who plodded silently in the ranks, who never drank or swore, and was always meditating on that far-off childish blasphemy, is surely a very odd figure in the army of that day.

Bond came under the teaching of the soldier-preacher Haime, and stepped into the gladness and freedom of a divine forgiveness. And the new forces in him must find utterance. He must tell some one of his deliverance: and by some strange impulse he chose the worst man in the company, Stanniforth, as his confidant. A stranger story to stranger ears was never yet told. "He came to me," records Stanniforth, "and recorded what God had done for his soul. But this was an unknown language to me; I understood it not; and soon as he was gone I used to make sport of all he said." But Bond was patient and invincible in his affection for his wild comrade; and at last he conquered him.

"'He met me one time,' says Stanniforth, 'when I was in distress, having neither food, money, nor credit. On his coming and asking me to go and hear the preaching, I said, "You had better give me something to eat or drink; for I am both hungry and dry."

He took me to a sutler's, and gave me both meat and drink. Then he took me by the hand, and led me to a place erected about half a mile from the camp. I had no desire to hear anything of religion, but on the contrary went with great reluctance. Who it was that was preaching I do not know. But this I know, that God spake to my heart. In a few minutes I was in deep distress—full of sorrow, under a deep sense of sin and danger, but mixed with a desire for mercy. And, now, I that never prayed in my life was continually calling upon God. In time past I could shed tears for nothing; but now the rock was rent; a fountain was opened, and tears of contrition ran plentifully down my cheeks. A cry after God was put into my heart, which has never yet ceased, and, I trust, never will.'"[1]

Bond rejoiced over his troubled comrade with running tears. A strange and instant transformation took place in Stanniforth's habits. The rough, drunken, plundering, hard-swearing private was a new man. He drank no more. He fell strangely silent. He had the sharpest hunger for religious services. He went to one of the little soldier-gatherings, and stood, awkward and solitary, amongst his comrades. One came up and asked him how long he had come to the preaching. "I answered, 'last night was the first time.' He took me aside, and said, 'Let's go to prayer.' I said, 'I cannot pray; I never prayed in my life.'" His comrade made him kneel down beside him, and just then Bond came up. After prayer Stanniforth was asked if he had a Bible, or any good book. "I said, 'No.' I knew not that I ever had read any." Bond had as his chief treasure a piece of an old Bible. "Take it," he said; "I can do better without it than thou."

Stanniforth was still wholly uncomforted, but his comrades tried in vain to tempt him back to his old haunts. "I had now a tender conscience," he says; "I could neither drink, swear, game, nor plunder any more. I would not take so much as an apple, a bunch of grapes —not anything that was not my own."

Bond took charge, not only of the spiritual condition of his troubled comrade, but of his affairs generally. "He inquired into all my affairs, and, finding I had

[1] "Lives of Early Methodist Preachers," vol. ii. p. 156.

contracted some debts, said, 'The followers of Christ must be first just, and then charitable. We will put both our pay together, and live as hard as we can; and what we spare will pay the debt.'" What finer example of chivalrous friendship can be imagined!

The two comrades were now on fire with a common impulse; they must rebuke sin. They must tell the strange and wonderful story of Christ and His love. Old comrades listened, stared, were melted, joined them, and, as Stanniforth records, "the flame spread through all the camp, so that we had a large number of hearers."

At Ghent, where the army was in camp for some weeks, Bond and Stanniforth hired two rooms, one for preaching, one for private meetings, and here little crowds of soldiers met twice every day. All this time, however, Stanniforth himself was in the deepest spiritual distress. His spiritual condition, indeed, was a paradox. He was living a godly life yet carrying the burden of unforgiven sin. By a strange gate he at last found entrance into a world of light.

"I thought myself the most miserable creature on earth, far beneath the brute and inanimate creatures; all of which answered the end of their creation, which I have never done! From twelve at night till two it was my turn to stand sentinel at a dangerous post. I had a fellow-sentinel; but I desired him to go away, which he willingly did. As soon as I was alone I kneeled down, and determined not to rise, but to continue crying and wrestling with God till He had mercy on me. How long I was in that agony I cannot tell. But as I looked up to heaven I saw the clouds open exceeding bright, and I saw Jesus hanging on the cross. At the same moment these words were applied to my heart, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.' My chains fell off; my heart was free. All guilt was gone, and my soul was filled with unutterable peace. I loved God and all mankind, and the fear of death and hell was vanished away. I was filled with wonder and astonishment."[1]

Who is not moved by this picture of a lonely sentinel at midnight keeping watch in front of an enemy's camp, praying, weeping, struggling? And suddenly there breaks upon him out of the darkness a vision as wonderful as that which fell upon Paul outside the gates of Damascus.

[1] "Lives of Early Methodist Preachers," vol. ii. p. 161.

Was the vision real? Who can undertake to say how God may manifest Himself to such a soul as that of this untaught and despairing soldier? When Bond the next morning met his comrade, no words of explanation were needed. Stanniforth's face told the tale. "I know God has set your soul at liberty," cried Bond. "I see it in your countenance."

The work spread now with new energy. The meetings were more frequent, and drew larger crowds. "God increased our number every day, so that we had some in almost every regiment."

Stanniforth had his first experience of battle at Fontenoy. Just before the fight began his regiment was ordered to stand at ease. The men threw themselves on the ground. Stanniforth tells how he went a few paces ahead, flung himself with his face in the grass, and "prayed that God would deliver me from all fear, and enable me to behave as a Christian and good soldier. Glory be to God, He heard my cry, and took away all my fear! I came into the ranks again, and had both peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

And how did these preaching and praying Methodist soldiers fight? On that subject there is abundant evidence. Wesley records dining with the colonel of one of the regiments which served in Flanders, who told him, "No men fight like those who fear God. I had rather command five hundred such than any regiment in the army." Their religion touched the rough spirits of these soldier Methodists to a strange tenderness, even towards their enemies. "On the 29th," says Haime, "we marched close to the enemy, and when I saw them in their camp my bowels moved toward them in love and pity for their souls." That was a strange and noble mood of feeling for a British private in sight of the enemy's columns!

"'Some days before the late battle,' says another of these Methodist soldiers, 'one of them, standing at his tent-door, broke out into raptures of joy, knowing his departure was at hand, and was so filled with the love of God that he danced before his comrades. In the battle, before he died, he openly declared, "I am going to rest from my labours in the bosom of Jesus." I believe nothing like this was ever heard of before, in the midst of so wicked an army as ours. Some were crying out in their wounds, "I am

going to my Beloved." Others, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." And many that were not wounded were crying to their Lord to take them to Himself. There was such boldness in the battle among this little despised flock that it made the officers, as well as common soldiers, amazed. And they acknowledge it to this day.'"[1]

Fontenoy is one of the most bloody fights in history. It is difficult to name a battle in which there was less of leadership amongst the generals, and more of dogged courage in the ranks. Stanniforth's regiment shared in the fiercest struggle of the day. "All the day," he records, "I was in great spirits, and as composed in my mind as if I had been hearing a sermon. I neither desired life nor death, but was entirely happy in God." After the fight was over the surviving Methodists gathered together.

"We then began to inquire who of our society was gone home. We missed many out of our regiment. One was saying, 'Oh how happy I am!' And just as he spoke a cannon-ball came and took off his head. We lost four preachers and many of the society. But my dear companion, with the other brethren in the regiment, were still as the heart of one man. Such was the religion of the soldiers at this time, before any of them were corrupted by new opinions! I then thought, 'This state of life is the only one to love and serve God in. I would not change it for any other under the sun, upon any consideration whatever.'"[2]

Stanniforth's regiment was recalled to England by the rising of the Highlands in favour of Prince Charlie. After Culloden, the regiment was in barracks at Canterbury, and Stanniforth fell in love, was married; but on his very wedding-day was called upon to join his regiment, then under sudden orders for Holland. He kissed his new-married wife and marched off. He took part in the fierce and utterly useless fight in front of Maestricht, and here he lost his faithful comrade Bond. The commander, Prince Charles, abandoned his rear-guard to destruction, and marched off with his main body. "We lay waiting for orders to retreat," says Stanniforth, "but the Prince forgot to send them, being busy with his cups and his ladies." The rear-guard was attacked by overwhelming

[1] "Lives of Early Methodist Preachers," vol. ii. p. 168.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

forces, fought stubbornly until almost cut to pieces, and then fell back. Says Stanniforth:—

"All this time I found a constant waiting upon God. All fear was removed. I had no tremor on my spirits, and the presence of God was with me all the day long. My dear companion was on my right hand, and had been all the night. As we were both in the front rank, a musket-ball came and went through his leg. He fell down at my feet, looked up in my face with a smile, and said, 'My dear, I am wounded.' I and another took him in our arms, and carried him out of the ranks, while he was exhorting me to stand fast in the Lord. We laid him down, took our leave of him, and fell into our ranks again. In our farther retreat I again met with my dear friend, who had received another ball through his thigh. But his heart was full of love, and his eyes full of heaven. I may justly say, 'Here fell a great Christian, a good soldier, a faithful friend.'"

After his discharge from the army Stanniforth became one of Wesley's preachers, and carried into his preaching the energy and courage of his soldier days. He died an old man, almost his last words being a fragment of a Methodist hymn:—

"My God I am Thine;
What a comfort divine,
What a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine."

Haime was a soldier of another type, and went through very curious experiences. He was a Dorsetshire lad, violent in temper, gross in speech, utterly lawless in conduct. He, like Bond, was visited with what is to-day an almost unthinkable spiritual experience—a violent temptation to blaspheme God. He yielded at last, in the silence of his heart framed the dreadful words, and was then told by the tempter, "Thou art inevitably damned." The unhappy youth was broken-hearted. He swung for a time betwixt plans of suicide and wild rushes into vicious pleasure. The terrors of sin haunted him. He had experiences which can hardly be paralleled out of monkish literature.

"One night, as I was going to bed, I durst not lie down without prayer. So, falling upon my knees, I began to consider, 'What can I pray for? I have neither the will nor the power to do any-

thing good.' Then it darted into my mind, 'I will not pray, neither will I be beholden to God for mercy.' I arose from my knees without prayer, and laid me down; but not in peace. I never had such a night before. I was as if my very body had been in a fire; and I had a hell in my conscience. I was thoroughly persuaded the devil was in the room."

He was violently tempted to repeat the act of blasphemy against God, and one day when the temptation was upon him in overpowering violence he records, "Having a stick in my hand, I threw it towards heaven, against God, with the utmost enmity. Immediately I saw in the clear element a creature like a swan, but much larger, part black, part brown. It flew at me, and went just over my head. Then it went about forty yards, lighted on the ground, and stood staring upon me. This was in a clear day, about twelve o'clock."

Haime now enlisted in a dragoon regiment, leaving his wife and children. When his regiment was on the march to Scotland the first gleam of light broke into the unhappy soldier's darkness. He came across Bunyan's "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners"; and across the space of more than a hundred years the voice of the Bedfordshire tinker talked to the heart of this tormented soldier.

"One day, as I walked by the Tweed side, I cried aloud, being all athirst for God, 'Oh that Thou wouldst hear my prayer, and let my cry come up before Thee!' The Lord heard. He sent a gracious answer. He lifted me up out of the dungeon. He took away my sorrow and fear, and filled my soul with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. The stream glided swiftly along, and all nature seemed to rejoice with me. I was truly free; and had I had any to guide me I need never more have come into bondage."

But the gleam of light soon faded, and again poor Haime walked in a world of terrors. "Many times," he says, "I stopped in the street afraid to go one step farther lest I should step into hell."

What is the secret of the experiences of such men as Haime and Bond? They were not born under the shadow of any dreadful creed. No gloomy theology poisoned their imagination. They practically had no theology,

good or bad. The secret lies in the dim, unconscious sense of the terrors of an offended God, awakened in the human conscience, unaccompanied by any vision of the forgiving mercy of God in Christ.

Haime's regiment was ordered to Flanders, and slowly, with many struggles and many relapses, he found his way into light and gladness. He wrote to Wesley, and Wesley's reply is interesting as furnishing a glimpse of the correspondence he carried on with multitudes of all ranks.

"'It is a great blessing,' wrote Wesley, 'whereof God has already made you a partaker; but if you continue waiting upon Him you will see greater things than these. This is only the beginning of the kingdom of Heaven which He will set up in your heart. If He give you any companion in the narrow way, it is well; and it is well if He do not. So much the more will He teach and strengthen you by Himself. He will strengthen you in the secret of your heart. But by all means, miss no opportunity. Speak and spare not. Declare what God has done for your soul. Regard not worldly prudence. Be not ashamed of Christ, or of His word, or of His servants. Speak the truth in love, even in the midst of a crooked generation.'" [1]

Haime acted on Wesley's counsel, and commenced to speak of Christ to his comrades. He took part in the battle of Dettingen, and his account of it is curiously interesting.

"I had no sooner joined the regiment than my left-hand man was shot dead. I cried to God, and said, 'In Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded.' My heart was filled with love, peace, and joy more than tongue can express. I was in a new world. I could truly say, 'Unto you that believe He is precious.' I stood the fire of the enemy seven hours. And when the battle was over I was sent out with a party of men to find the baggage-waggon, but returned without success. In the meanwhile the army was gone, and I knew not which way. I went to the field where the battle was fought, but such a scene of human misery did I never behold! It was enough to melt the most obdurate heart. I knew not now which way to take, being afraid of falling into the hands of the enemy. But as it began to rain hard, I set out, though not knowing where to go; till, hearing the beat of

[1] "Lives of Early Methodist Preachers," vol. ii. p. 158.

the drum, I went towards it, and soon rejoined the army. But I could not find the tent which I belonged to, nor persuade them to take me in at any other. So, being very wet and much fatigued, I wrapped myself up in my cloak and lay down and fell asleep. And though it still rained upon me, and the water ran under me, I had as sweet a night's rest as ever I had in my life."

After the battle the army fell back to Flanders, and remained in quarters near Ghent. Haime tells the story of how he began meetings there:—

"Being in Ghent, I went one Sunday morning to the English Church at the usual time. But neither minister nor people came. As I was walking in the church, two men belonging to the train came in, John Evans and Pitman Stag. One of them said, 'The people are long in coming.' I said, 'Yet they think, however they live, of going to heaven when they die. But most of them, I fear, will be sadly disappointed.' They stared at me, and asked me what I meant. I told them, 'Nothing unholy can dwell with a holy God.' We had a little more talk, and appointed to meet in the evening. We took a room without delay, and met every night to pray and read the Holy Scriptures. In a little time we were as speckled birds, as 'men wondered at.' But some began to listen under the window, and soon after desired to meet with us. Our meetings were soon sweeter than our food."

It must have been difficult to maintain religious services amongst troops constantly on the march; but Haime explains their methods. "Our general plan was, as soon as we were settled in any camp, to build a tabernacle, containing two, three, or four rooms, as we saw convenient. One day three officers came to see our chapel, as they called it. They asked many questions. One in particular asked me what I preached. I answered, 'I preach against swearing, whoring, and drunkenness; and exhort men to repent of all their sins, that they may not perish.' He began swearing horribly, and said, if it were in his power, he would have me whipped to death. I told him, 'Sir, you have a commission over men; but I have a commission from God to tell you, you must either repent of your sins or perish everlastingly.'"

The fire, fed with such courage, spread. "We had now," says Haime, "three hundred in the society, and six preachers beside myself." Fontenoy sadly reduced the

little godly band; but still the good work was maintained. Officers not seldom were amongst Haime's hearers, and one day the Duke of Cumberland came and stood amongst the crowd who listened.

But human experience is liable to tragical changes. Haime was tempted, and fell. He gives the date with sorrowful exactness. "April 6, 1746, I was off my watch, and fell by a grievous temptation. It came as quick as lightning, I knew not if I were in my senses; but I fell, and the Spirit of God departed from me." For twenty years poor Haime walked in the shadow of that fall. He passed through religious experiences which resemble nothing so much as the darkest circles in Dante's inferno. His grief broke his health and affected his very senses.

"I could not see the sun for more than eight months. Even in the clearest summer day it always appeared to me like a mass of blood. At the same time I lost the use of my knees. I cannot describe what I felt. I could truly say, 'Thou hast sent fire into my bones.' I was often as hot as if I were burning to death. Many times I looked to see if my clothes were set on fire. I have gone into a river to cool myself; but it was all the same. For what could quench the wrath of His indignation that was let loose upon me? At other times, in the midst of summer, I have been so cold that I knew not how to bear it. All the clothes I could put on had no effect, but my flesh shivered, and my very bones quaked. God grant, reader, thou and I may never feel how hot or how cold it is in hell!"

But no matter in what deep waters poor Haime waded, he still preached, warned, exhorted. "Some may inquire, what could move me to preach while I was in such a forlorn condition? They must ask of God, for what I cannot tell. His ways herein are past finding out." He tells again: "When Satan has strongly suggested, just as I was going to preach, 'I will have thee at last,' I have answered (sometimes with too much anger), 'I will have another out of thy hand first.' And many, while I was myself in the deep, were truly convinced, and converted to God."

It is not easy to imagine a figure at once more pathetic and more heroic than that of this soldier-preacher, carrying the burden of that far-off sin, and yet preaching to

others a Gospel he did not himself realise. After his discharge from the army Haime went to Wesley and asked to be accepted as one of his preachers. Wesley looked with his shrewd but kindly eyes on the worn face of the veteran, and accepted him. Later he made him for a while his personal companion, and took him with him when travelling. Haime found his way into clear experience at last and died when nearly eighty years of age. His last prayer, spoken with failing voice, was: "O Almighty God, Who dwellest in light which no mortal can approach, and where no unclean thing can enter, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts; grant us continually sweet peace, quietness, and assurance of Thy favour!"

Such men as Haime, Stanniforth, and Bond are types of a class; they are figures which symbolise the forces of a spiritual revolution. These men, during the early stages of their religious life at all events, owed little to Wesley personally. Haime, in his first letter to Wesley, says: "I am a stranger to you in the flesh. I know not if I have seen you above once, when I saw you preaching on Kennington Common. And then I hated you, as much now as (by the grace of God) I love you." They went through dreadful struggles before they saw his face. But Wesley was their natural leader. His sympathy with the army was always alert and keen. He records in his Journal, speaking of Ireland, "The first call is to the soldiery." Wesley's character was one that specially appealed to what may be called the soldierly imagination —his courage, his instinct for discipline, his look and accent of command. He was the one visible figure, too, in the whole spiritual movement by which these soldiers were affected. They talked of him on the march, wrote to him from their camps, passed from hand to hand as treasures the letters he had written to some of them. And when they were discharged they naturally joined his Societies.

These brave Methodist soldiers lie in forgotten graves scattered over the Continent; but it is worth while to recall their memory. They show how the new spiritual forces sweeping through England reached classes that seemed quite beyond the reach of the preachers and leaders of that movement.

# CHAPTER X

## HOW THE WORK SPREAD: SCOTLAND

It was certain, in advance, that a spiritual revolution, such as that which was now in progress, could not be confined within narrow geographical limits. The very winds would carry it over land and sea.

Whitefield was the *avant courier* of the movement, the Prince Rupert of the new spiritual army. Wesley had less imagination and more practical sense than his great comrade. Remoter horizons did not tempt him. His mind was concentrated on the work immediately under his hands. With the wise instinct of a great leader, he loved to make each step he took secure before taking the next. Ten years, therefore, in advance of Wesley, Whitefield invaded Scotland. The Erskines, who headed a secession from the Scotch Church in the early days of the eighteenth century, and had formed what was known as the Associate Presbytery, urged him to come, and in July 1741 he visited Dunfermline and had a conference with the elder Erskine.

Whitefield had at least one point of ardent agreement with the Erskines. He was a convinced Calvinist, and intercourse with Jonathan Edwards in America had given his Calvinism a more resolute temper than ever. But there was also one fundamental discord betwixt them. The Seceders, after their stubborn Scottish fashion, were fanatical on the question of Church government. They were as eager for the rights of the people in the election of ministers, as they were for the true doctrine of the eternal decrees, or of the divinity of Christ. The "wickedness" of the patronage laws was to them as detestable as the worst forms of Arianism. Like their natural enemies, the sacerdotalists, their theology had no perspective.

They wished, of course, to capture Whitefield. "Unless you come with a design to meet and abide with us of the

Associate Presbytery I would dread the consequence of your coming," wrote Ralph Erskine. But Whitefield was the last man in the world to be imprisoned within any narrow ecclesiastical boundaries. He met the Associate Presbytery, a set of grave and venerable men. He records that, after a brief conversation, they were proceeding to choose a Moderator:—

"I asked them for what purpose? They answered, to discourse, and set me right about the matter of Church government, and the Solemn League and Covenant. I replied they might save themselves that trouble, for I had no scruples about it, and that settling Church government and preaching about the Solemn League and Covenant was not my plan."[1]

Whitefield added that "he had never yet made the Solemn League and Covenant the object of his study, being busy about matters of greater importance." This, in the ears of the venerable seceders, was nothing less than flat blasphemy. "Every pin in the tabernacle was precious," cried out several angry divines. In their eyes, indeed, the "pin" was apt to seem more precious than the whole tabernacle! Whitefield was asked to preach only for them, until he had got further light.

"I asked why only for them? Mr. Ralph Erskine said, 'They were the Lord's people.' I then asked whether there were no other Lord's people but themselves, and, supposing all others were the devil's people, they certainly had more need to be preached to, and therefore I was more and more determined to go out into the highways and hedges, and that if the Pope himself would lend me his pulpit I would gladly proclaim the righteousness of Christ therein."[2]

To one correspondent who had tried to bring Whitefield to correct ecclesiastical views the great preacher expounded with much simplicity his entire theory of Church order. "I wish," he said, "you would not trouble yourself or me in writing about the corruption of the Church of England. I believe there is no Church perfect under heaven; but as God, by His Providence, is pleased to send me forth simply to preach the Gospel to all, I

[1] Butler's "Wesley and Whitefield in Scotland," p. 23.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

think there is no need of casting myself out." The attempt, in a word, to imprison Whitefield in a little net of ecclesiastical theories was like trying to call some wide-winged sea-bird from the upper spaces of the air, and to shut it up in a cage.

Whitefield at once commenced open-air preaching in Edinburgh. Scotland is a land of good preachers, but it had never yet listened to such preaching as that of Whitefield. His deep melodious voice rang over vast crowds as with the vibrations of a great bell. His ardour, the note of passion that ran through his rhetoric, the trembling cadences of his eloquence, the visible tears running down his face, the flame-like zeal which burned in every syllable and gave energy to every gesture—these fairly carried away the Scottish crowds. Scottish preaching, as a rule, appeals to the reason rather than to the emotions, and ordinarily a Scottish audience hates either to see emotion or to express it. But there are fountains of feeling hidden deep in the rugged Scottish character, depths whose very existence is often unsuspected by their own possessors; and Whitefield somehow could reach these.

He paid, in all, fourteen visits to Scotland, and never before or since were such oratorical triumphs won by any single voice over Scottish audiences. He preached in the fields round Edinburgh to crowds of 20,000 people. In his second visit great rows of seats were erected in the Hospital Park, and let out to hearers at fixed prices. The concentrated and sustained energy of Whitefield's work in Scotland may well seem in these modern times incredible. On Sunday he preached four times in Edinburgh to vast crowds, and lectured in the evening in a private house. On Monday he preached three times and again lectured at night. On Tuesday he preached seven times, and writes, at the close of the amazing day, "I am now as fresh as when I arose in the morning!" Of what substance was such flesh and blood built?

Later, and when in the full rush of crowded services, he calmly records in his Journal, "I am exceedingly strengthened, both in soul and body, and cannot now do well without preaching three times a day." Preaching did not exhaust his strength; it seemed to renew it!

Butler, in his very interesting work, "John Wesley and George Whitefield in Scotland," says that Whitefield affected the Scottish towns by his preaching as Savonarola affected Florence; but Whitefield's preaching was more intensely spiritual than that of the great Florentine, and took a loftier flight. Perhaps Whitefield's work in Scotland reached its highest point in Cambuslang. Here a Scottish divine, McCulloch, a man of fine gifts and intense zeal, had prepared the way for Whitefield. The scene when Whitefield preached may be told in his own words:—

"At mid-day I came to Cambuslang and preached at two to a vast body of people; again at six, and again at nine at night. Such commotions, surely, were never heard of, especially at eleven o'clock at night. For an hour and a half there was much weeping, and so many falling into such deep distress, expressed in various ways, as cannot be described. The people seemed to be slain in scores. Their agonies and cries were exceedingly affecting. In the fields all night might be heard the voices of prayer and praise."[1]

Later, still more extraordinary effects were produced:—

"I never before saw such a universal stir. The motion fled as swift as lightning from one end of the auditory to the other. Thousands were bathed in tears—some wringing their hands, others almost swooning, and others crying out and mourning over a pierced Saviour. All night, in different companies, persons were praying to God and praising Him."

That Whitefield taught the spiritual life of the whole Scottish Church to beat for the moment with quicker pulse, cannot be doubted. And yet he left no permanent mark on Scottish religion. Edinburgh to-day no more bears his signature than does Florence that of Savonarola.

The Seceders who had invited Whitefield to Scotland viewed his success with alarm and disgust. Since he would not march under their flag he was to them nothing less than an enemy. They appointed a day of fasting and humiliation for the countenance given to Whitefield, "a priest of the Church of England who had sworn the

[1] Butler, p. 36.

oath of supremacy and abjured the Solemn League and Covenant." All the results of his preaching they bluntly ascribed to the devil—so blind can fanaticism be!

In 1751, ten years after Whitefield had crossed the Border, Wesley was invited by a pious soldier quartered at Musselburgh, Captain Gallatin, to visit him. Whitefield strongly advised him not to go. He told him bluntly:—

"You have no business there, for your principles are so well known that if you spoke like an angel none would hear you; and if they did, you would have nothing to do but to dispute with one and another from morning to night."

Wesley, it must be admitted, had some obvious disqualifications for a Scottish tour. He was known to abhor the Calvinistic theology. He was himself a preacher of what might be called the Scottish type, appealing to the reason and the conscience rather than the emotions, and he lacked the overwhelming emotional power of Whitefield. His preaching, therefore, would, for his hearers in Scotland, be without the charm of novelty. But as Wesley wrote to Whitefield:—

"If God sends me, people will hear. And I will give them no provocation to dispute; for I will studiously avoid controverted points, and keep to the fundamental truths of Christianity; and if any still begin to dispute, they may, but I will not dispute with them."

Wesley's first visit to Scotland lasted two days, but he returned two years afterwards, in 1753, and from that time a visit to Scotland every second or third year formed part of his regular work. He visited Scotland in all twenty-two times, and if his preaching never produced the immediate and wonderful effects of Whitefield's, yet he more permanently influenced Scotland than did his great comrade. He created Scottish Methodism, a branch of the great Methodist tree which, if dwarfed in mere bulk by other branches, has borne very rich fruit.

The elder Erskine succeeded for a moment in kindling much wrathful feeling against Wesley by reviving the Calvinistic controversy. He republished in Scotland, with an angry preface, the letters which had passed betwixt Wesley and Hervey, the author of "Theron and Aspasio,"

and Wesley had to realise of what shrewish bitterness in theological matters the Scottish temper is capable.

"'The Seceders,' he says, 'who have fallen in my way are more uncharitable than the Papists themselves. I never yet met a Papist who avowed the principle of murdering heretics. But a Seceding minister being asked, "Would not you, if it was in your power, cut the throats of all the Methodists?" replied directly, "Why, did not Samuel hew Agag in pieces before the Lord?" I have not yet met a Papist in this kingdom who would tell me to my face all but themselves must be damned; but I have seen Seceders enough who make no scruple to affirm none but themselves could be saved."

But the Seceders, with their bitter spirit, did not reflect the general temper. Wesley was listened to everywhere by great crowds, and was shown great honour. Only once, while preaching in the open air, was an act of rudeness shown to him. More than one Scottish city presented him with its freedom. He found in Lady Maxwell, in Edinburgh, and in Dr. Gillies, at Glasgow, friends and helpers of quenchless loyalty and great influence. Whitefield says in one of his letters at the time that Wesley was making in Scotland "a great mistake" in forming societies after the pattern of his English work. But Wesley had too profound a knowledge, both of human nature and of the religious life, to believe that his converts would survive if they were left without the shelter and the stimulus of spiritual fellowship. And what Whitefield regarded as Wesley's "mistake" in Scotland was in reality the secret of his enduring work there.

In organising these societies, as a matter of fact, Wesley was but following a noble Scottish precedent. The Scottish reformers of the sixteenth century, like the Lollards of the fifteenth century, formed meetings for "prophesying," which were almost the exact analogue of Wesley's class-meetings. These religious societies were strong in Scotland during the Covenanting period, and were the deep and vigorous roots which kept religion alive on Scottish soil. It is possible, indeed, to say that the Scottish reformers had anticipated many features of Wesley's own work. Intense spiritual life, of course, under any sky, and set in any historical conditions, will

naturally express itself in living fellowship. And the meetings for "prophesying" in Knox's time, with the class-meetings in Wesley's Church, are independent expressions of a universal spiritual impulse.

It is still amusing to read Wesley's descriptions of his Scottish audiences. They astonished him by their order, their gravity, and their absence of emotion. "They hear much, know everything, and feel nothing," he says. "They are so wise that they need no more knowledge, and so good that they need no more religion." The impassibility of his Scottish hearers provoked Wesley to the plainest speech. "I seldom speak," he says, "so roughly as in Scotland, but I never knew any in Scotland offended at plain dealing; in this respect the North Britons are a pattern to all mankind." "I am amazed at this people," he writes again. "I use the most cutting words, and apply them in the most pointed way; still they hear, but feel no more than the seats they sit upon."

He learned to cherish the highest respect for Scottish sense. "Only show them," he says, "the reasonableness in Scotland, and they will conform to anything." But Wesley was not in the least disposed to vary his methods to suit Scottish tastes. The Scotch love a fixed pastorate; if only because the stubborn instinct of property in the average Scotsman is affronted by having to share even his minister with somebody else. So Wesley was urged to modify the itinerancy of his helpers. He wrote in reply:—

"While I live, itinerant preachers shall be itinerants; I mean, if they choose to remain in connection with me. The society at Greenock are entirely at their own disposal; they may either have a preacher between them and Glasgow, or none at all. But more than one between them they cannot have. I have too much regard both for the bodies and souls of our preachers to let them be confined to one place any more. I have weighed the matter, and will serve the Scots as we do the English, or leave them."

One of his helpers in Glasgow had so far conformed to Scottish usage as to organise a kirk-session. Wesley writes to him from Cork:—

"'Sessions!' 'Elders!' We Methodists have no such custom, neither any of the Churches of God that are under our care. I require you, Jonathan Crowther, immediately to dissolve that

session (so-called) at Glasgow. Discharge them from meeting any more. And if they will leave the society, let them leave it. We acknowledge only preachers, stewards, and leaders among us, over which the assistant in each circuit presides. You ought to have kept to the Methodist plan from the beginning. Who had my authority to vary from it? If the people of Glasgow, or any other place, are weary of us, we will leave them to themselves. But we are willing to be still their servants, for Christ's sake, according to our own discipline, but no other."

Wesley loved his Scottish work and his Scottish hearers, and he maintained his tours in Scotland to the last years of his life. Some of the most touching pictures we have of Wesley in old age, pressing on with quenchless ardour in his work, when his very senses began to fail him, are under Scottish skies. He was eighty-seven years of age when he paid his twenty-second visit to Scotland, and he planned his journey and his preaching services on as daring a scale as ever. Here is a picture given by one of his helpers of his last visit to a Scottish town, Dumfries:—

"He came from Glasgow that day (about seventy miles), but his strength was almost exhausted, and when he attempted to preach very few could hear him. His sight was likewise much decayed, so that he could neither read the hymn or text. The wheels of life were ready to stand still; but his conversation was agreeably edifying, being mixed with the wisdom and gravity of a parent and the artless simplicity of a child."

Wesley's own record of the service is, "I travelled yesterday nearly eighty miles, and preached in the evening without any pain. The Lord does what pleases Him."

Butler, in his work on the influence of the Oxford Methodists on Scottish religion, says that Wesley was for Scotland "a spiritual splendour"; and if Methodism as a separate body does not bulk large on the Scottish landscape, yet its influence on the spiritual life of Scotland has been deep and enduring.

# CHAPTER XI

## HOW THE WORK SPREAD: IRELAND

IRELAND was for Wesley a new field, strange, wild, unhappy —the very paradox of civilisation; a field in which, not by any unkindness of nature or any ordinance of God, but only by the follies and hates of mankind, good things became evil. Law inspired crime. Religion bred hate. Freedom became the author of tyranny. The Ireland of the early Georges and of the penal laws! Was there any other patch of soil in the civilised world where the defeat of the religion of Jesus Christ was so nearly absolute, and the task of religion more hopeless?

Lord Hutchinson, it will be remembered, condensed the Ireland of that day into one terrible sentence: "A corrupt aristocracy, a ferocious commonalty, a distracted Government, a divided people." Society was one tangled web of dreadful hates. The Protestant hated and oppressed the Catholic; the Anglican hated and oppressed the Nonconformist; the Romanist hated and, where he had the chance, slew both. Green says: "After the surrender of Limerick every Catholic Irishman, and there were five Irish Catholics to every Irish Protestant, was treated as a stranger and a foreigner in his own country."[1] The Government was in the hands of one-twelfth of the population, and was used by them to fill their pockets at the expense of the other eleven-twelfths. Class feuds were nourished by law. The Irish Catholic was practically an outlaw under his own native skies; the Irish Presbyterian lived under the harrow of the Test Act; and even the Irish Anglican had to stand hat in hand before an Anglican who had the merit of being English.

But it is the dreadful paradox of Irish affairs in the eighteenth century which most impresses the student in

[1] "Short History," p. 811.

the twentieth century. It represents an inversion, almost without parallel in history, of all natural order. Englishmen had won freedom in England only to deny it to Irishmen in Ireland. The two noblest forces in human society are the authority of law and the authority of religion. They are, or should be, allies. But in the Ireland of that day they were sworn and deadly foes. The main object of the law in Ireland was the extirpation of what four out of every five of its inhabitants held as their religion. Nowhere was Protestantism—or rather what mistook itself for Protestantism—so strong, and nowhere had it failed so absolutely. Nowhere else was Romanism so harried and handicapped; and nowhere else was it so nearly triumphant! It was persecuted; and persecution hardened its priests into fanatics, it ennobled them into martyrs.

The Protestantism which Ireland in those sad days knew had borrowed the persecuting policy of Rome: and persecution in its case was twin-sister to greed. It was as eager to pick the pockets of its victim, or to confiscate his farm, as to punish his deplorably corrupt theology. The Irish peasant, in his turn, was wedded to his religion not simply by spiritual forces—often not in the least by spiritual forces—but by a cluster of forces which were the contradiction of everything spiritual: by class hate; by the memory of inexpiable wrongs, wrongs sometimes endured, sometimes committed; by loyalty to his class; by his ignorance, in a word, and by his hates. And never was ignorance so complete or hate so bitter! They were ancestral hates, that had their roots in history, and were kept living and deep by oppression.

And never did Protestantism sin so fatally against its own genius as in the Ireland of that day. The Protestant vicar took every tenth potato from the Romish peasant for his own support; but he made no attempt to convert him, to understand him, to talk his language, or to enlighten his ignorance. Lecky's picture of the Irish Church of that day has in it a touch of the iron severity of Tacitus:—

"The Irish Establishment was the Church of the poor in the sense that they paid for it, but in no other. Its adherents were certainly less than one-seventh of the population, and they be-

longed exclusively to the wealthiest class. And this astonishing Establishment was mainly supported by tithes. The mass of the Irish Catholics were cottiers living in an abject, hopeless poverty hardly paralleled in Europe, and deriving a bare subsistence for themselves and their families from little plots of potato ground, often of not more than ten or fifteen perches. The tenth part of the produce of these plots was rigidly exacted from the wretched tenant for the benefit of a clergyman who was in violent hostility to his religion, whom in many cases he never saw, and from whose ministrations he derived no benefit whatever." [1]

"'A system of half persecution was pursued,' says Southey, 'at once odious for its injustice and contemptible for its inefficacy. Good principles and generous feelings were thereby provoked into an alliance with superstition and priestcraft; and the priests, whom the law recognised only for the purpose of punishing them if they discharged the forms of their office, established a more absolute dominion over the minds of the Irish people than was possessed by the clergy in any other part of the world. It would be difficult, in the whole compass of history, to find another instance in which such various and such powerful agencies concurred to degrade the character and to blast the prosperity of a nation.'" [2]

What type of character did these evil conditions create? The Irish are peculiarly susceptible to the influences which stream upon them from history, from legislation, and from the Church. "No people," says Lecky, "brooded more upon old wrongs, clung more closely to old habits, were more governed by imagination, association and custom." And history, the law, the Church, alike combined to corrupt them. To quote Lecky again:—

"They were half-naked, half-starved, utterly destitute of all providence, and of all education, liable at any time to be turned adrift from their holdings, ground to the dust by three great burdens—rack rents, paid not to the landlord but to the middleman; tithes, paid to the clergy—often the absentee clergy—of the Church of their oppressors; and dues, paid to their own priests." [3]

And it was upon a field so hopeless as this, and sown so thickly with evil tares, that Wesley was about to step. Southey says that "all the circumstances were

[1] Lecky, vol. ii. p. 197. [2] Southey, vol. ii. p. 107.
[3] Lecky, vol. i. p. 241.

as favourable for the progress of Methodism in Ireland as they were adverse to it in Scotland," and he proceeds to cite these: the failure of the Established Church, &c. But this is an absurd inversion of fact. In Scotland Wesley was at least a Protestant speaking to Protestants. He did not represent a foreign and hated race. But in Ireland the hate of a Romanist for a Protestant, the mistrust of an Irishman for everything English, and the bitterness bred of political wrongs and ancestral hates, whose origin ran back into far-off centuries, were all against him.

And yet, great are the forces of simple and genuine religion! By the magic of truth, truth with love as its vehicle and minister, Wesley won in Ireland a success certainly greater than that he won in Scotland, and second only to that he won in England. What Methodism did in Ireland is not to be measured by the chapels built, the circuits formed, the societies gathered. Methodism was the earliest and noblest of those healing forces which touched Irish history, and have done so much to transfigure it. Here was a form of religion which did not carry a pike in one hand, and a writ of proscription in the other. Here were messengers of Christ's Gospel whose chief characteristic was not a ruthless hunger for tithes from the pockets of those who hated both them and their creed. Methodism saved Protestantism as a spiritual force in Ireland. It did something to arrest that dreadful divorce betwixt classes which threatened to destroy society itself. When it stepped on to Irish soil there became visible a form of Protestantism which suffered persecution instead of inflicting it. It talked the language of the first Christian century, and had something at least of the spirit of that far-off century—its heroic zeal, its exultant faith, its eager and tender sympathy.

Wesley himself brought no political cure to Ireland, and he stood as resolutely aloof from Irish party disputes as he did from Scottish theological quarrels. But he looked, with at least a flash of the clear vision of a Christian statesman, into the black mist of Irish politics. He was a "King and Church" man, with a strain of Oxford Toryism in his very blood. And yet, as far as Ireland was concerned, he was, in judgment and sympathy, a Pittite

before Pitt! This is how he explains the Romanism of Ireland:—

"At least ninety-nine in a hundred of the native Irish remain in the religion of their forefathers. Nor is it any wonder that those who are born Papists generally live and die such, when the Protestants can find no better ways to convert them than penal laws and Acts of Parliament."

He relates how, with the book before him on the saddle, and riding along Irish roads, he read that not very accurate work, Sir John Davies's "Historic Relation Concerning Ireland," and in his Journal he comments:—

"None who reads these can wonder that, fruitful as it is, it was always so thinly inhabited; for he makes it plain—(1) That murder was never capital among the native Irish; the murderer only paid a small fine to the chief of his sept. (2) When the English settled here, still the Irish had no benefit of the English laws. They could not so much as sue an Englishman. So the English beat, plundered, yea, murdered them at pleasure. Hence (3) arose continual wars between them, for three hundred and fifty years together, and hereby both the English and Irish natives were kept few as well as poor."

Wesley adds that in the general massacre of 1641, and the war that followed, "not so few as a million men, women, and children were destroyed in four years' time"; a bit of wildly imaginative arithmetic which proves afresh how difficult it is for those who live near great historical events to see their true size.

Wesley's mission to Ireland, however, was first and last spiritual, alike in its methods and its ends. He arrived in Dublin on August 9, 1747. It was Sunday, the church bells were ringing, and he went, after his manner, straight to the service in St. Mary's, and preached in the same church in the evening. Methodism had already found a place in Dublin. A lay helper from England, Thomas Williams, had gathered a society there, and had hired an old Lutheran chapel as a preaching place. Here Wesley preached to crowds that filled the chapel yard as well as the chapel.

He spent a fortnight in Dublin, and studied with keen eyes the character of his Irish hearers. There was no

touch in them of Scottish gravity, with its unresponsiveness as of Scotch granite; and none of the boorishness of the English rustic. These new hearers were quick-witted, courteous, impressionable; and, as Wesley records, "an immeasurably loving people." Later, Wesley found that an Irish convert, with his Celtic quickness and generosity, his susceptibility to emotion, had the defects of his qualities. "The waters," he said, grimly, after telling the story of a congregation that was dissolved in tears at his sermon, "spread too wide to be deep." He notes, too, how little relation the Irish peasant's religion often has to his understanding. Ignorance in his case does not hinder or limit devotion. "The more I converse with this people," he says, "the more I am amazed. That God hath wrought a great work among them, is manifest; and yet the main of them, believers and unbelievers, are not able to give a rational account of the plainest principles of religion. It is plain, God begins His work at the heart; then 'the inspiration of the Highest giveth understanding.'"

After only a fortnight's work in Dublin, Wesley writes: "If my brother or I could have been here a few months I question if there might not have been a larger society in Dublin than even London itself."

But two weeks after he had left, his brother Charles, accompanied by Charles Perronet, arrived, and took up his work; and even in that brief interval betwixt the departure of one brother and the arrival of another, the changeful quality of Irish temper and the uneasy jealousy of Romish priests found illustration. The priests had taken alarm. Here was a new kind of Protestantism that had for their flocks a strange magic. It must be arrested! And an Irish priest would make his appearance on the edge of a crowd listening to a Methodist helper, and drive off his own people with gestures and curses, like a watch-dog harrying a flock of sheep that had wandered into forbidden pastures. A Popish mob broke into the Dublin chapel, made a bonfire of the seats and the pulpit, and threatened to murder any one assembled there. The blasts of mob violence in Ireland usually had the support of the local authorities, who in all cases were Protestants; and who not seldom hated Methodists even more than they disliked

Papists. Charles Wesley himself was stoned through the Dublin streets. A woman was beaten to death in an assault of the mob on one of the Methodist gatherings. One of Wesley's helpers, John Beard, died as the result of the ill-usage he received, and was the first—but not the last—Methodist martyr in Ireland.

Wesley's second visit to Ireland (in 1748) lasted three months, and was marked by intense toil, by some triumphant results, and by much persecution. He found that his Irish hearers took their religion lightly. He missed the deep convictions, the overwhelming sense of sin, which marked his English and Scotch converts; and so, as he records, he "preached on the terrors of the law in the strongest manner of which he was capable." Yet "still," he says, "those who were ready to eat up every word do not appear to digest any part of it." But Wesley, somehow—this prim, intense, methodical, and unemotional Englishman—had the secret of winning the love of his Irish hearers.

Thus at Athlone he preached to a vast crowd in the market-place, and found it difficult to escape from the loving throng that pressed on him. He broke away at last; but a mile out of the town, on a hill-top which the road crossed, he found another crowd waiting to intercept him. They opened the way for him till he reached their midst, then closed round him and would not let him go. The crowd sang hymn after hymn together, and when at last Wesley got free "men, women, and children lifted up their voices and with a sound," Wesley declares, "he had never heard before." "Yet in a little while," he adds, with one quick, forerunning vision into the happier world, "and we shall meet to part no more, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away for ever."

The fiercest outbreak of popular violence was at Cork. Here the crowd practically took possession of the city under the leadership of an itinerant ballad-singer, half fool and half rogue, named Butler, who was accustomed to parade the streets in a burlesque of clerical attire, with a Bible in one hand and a bundle of ballads in the other. The magistrates sympathised with the crowd, and the Methodists were hunted through the streets like vermin. An appeal to the Mayor only produced the answer that

Popish priests were protected, but Methodists were not. Many Methodists, both men and women, were beaten with clubs or wounded with swords; their houses were plundered and half destroyed. An information was laid against Charles Wesley as "a person of ill-fame, a vagabond, and a common disturber of his Majesty's peace," with a prayer that he might be transported. A similar information was lodged against all the Methodist helpers at that moment in Ireland.

When the case came before the court the judge inquired, "Where were the persons presented?" He glanced at Charles Wesley, with the company of his preachers about him, as they came forward, and seemed for some time visibly agitated, and unable to proceed. Here was a group of strange criminals! The first witness for the prosecution was Butler, who being asked his occupation answered that he was a ballad-singer. "Here," cried the judge, lifting up his hands in wonder, "here are six gentlemen indicted as vagabonds; and the first accuser is a vagabond by profession."

Persecution, however, never slew even a bad creed. It was not in the least likely to hinder Methodism. In Ireland the Methodist preachers had many strange experiences; much hardship; many odd conversions; many queer followers; but their success was great. Wesley himself, summing up the fruits of his work in Dublin, says:—

"In some respects the work of God in Dublin was more remarkable than even in London. (1) It is far greater, in proportion to the time and to the number of people. (2) The work was more pure. In all this time, while they were mildly and tenderly treated, there were none of them headstrong or unadvisable; none that were wiser than their teachers; none who dreamed of being immortal or infallible, or incapable of temptation; in short, no whimsical or enthusiastic persons; all were calm and sober-minded."[1]

Wesley, it may be added, adapted his methods to the conditions of Irish society. He had to brace the morality of his converts in some respects by the sharpest discipline. He relentlessly expelled from his societies those who assisted to plunder the cargo of a wrecked ship until

[1] Journal, July 26, 1762.

they made restitution. One who quoted the famous saying that "cleanliness is next to godliness" naturally looked with unrelenting eyes on the easy-going, unwashed habits of many of his converts. He required his preachers, in dress and habit, to be a rebuke to all slovenliness. Thus to one of his Irish preachers he writes, instructing him, with plain-spoken directness, "to avoid all laziness, sloth, indolence"; all "nastiness, dirt, slovenliness," &c. "Whatever clothes you wear," wrote Wesley, "let them be whole: no rents, no tatters, no rags." He even thought necessary to add, "Clean yourself of lice," "Cure yourselves and your family of the itch."

Many converts were won amongst the Irish Roman Catholics, and amongst them one—Thomas Walsh—who would have been a remarkable man in any age and under any form of society.

Southey dwells at length on Walsh's case, drawn visibly into a mood of admiring sympathy by the scholarship this strange convert achieved. Here was an Irish peasant, the son of a carpenter, the child of fanatical Romanists, who had renounced Romanism as the result of mere intellectual recoil from its errors. He had been brought into clear and happy spiritual life while hearing a Methodist preacher at a street corner in Limerick expounding Christ's words, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour," &c. This man made himself, in Wesley's words, "the best Biblical scholar I have ever known." He knew Hebrew and Greek as perfectly as he knew his native Erse. If questioned concerning any Hebrew or Greek word in the Bible he would tell after a pause how often and where it occurred, and what it meant in every place.

But Walsh was something more than an amazing scholar in certain lines. He had a genius for religion; and his life, to quote Southey, "might well convince even a Catholic that saints are to be found in other communions as well as in the Church of Rome." Walsh himself describes what may be called the mountain heights to which he was lifted as the result of his conversion:—

"'Now,' says he, 'I felt of a truth that faith is the substance or subsistence of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. God and the things of the invisible world, of which I had

only heard before by the hearing of the ear, appeared now in their true light as substantial realities. Faith gave me to see a reconciled God and an all-sufficient Saviour. The Kingdom of God was within me. I drew water out of the wells of salvation. I walked and talked with God all the day long: whatsoever I believed to be His will I did with my whole heart. I could unfeignedly love them that hated me and pray for them that despitefully used and persecuted me. The commandments of God were my delight." [1]

Walsh carried his piety into his studies, and here is the prayer with which he was accustomed to preface each new hour of study:—

"Lord Jesus, I lay my soul at Thy feet to be taught and governed by Thee. Take the veil from the mystery and show me the truth as it is in Thyself. Be Thou my sun and star by day and by night!"

His religion had in it a touch of something unearthly. He seemed to breathe strange airs. His feet trod the earth, but his spirit was in the celestial realm. Southey says:—

"His friends described him as appearing like one who had returned from the other world, and perhaps it was this unearthly manner which induced a Romish priest to assure his flock that the Walsh who had turned heretic and went about preaching was dead long since; and that he who preached under that name was the devil in his shape. It is said that he walked through the streets of London with as little attention to all things around him as if he had been in a wilderness, unobservant of whatever would have attracted the sight of others, and as indifferent to all sounds of excitement, uproar, and exultation as to the passing wind. He showed the same insensibility to the influence of fine scenery and sunshine; the only natural object of which he spoke with feeling was the starry firmament—for there he beheld infinity. . . .

"Sometimes he was lost, they say, in glorious absence, on his knees with his face heavenwards and arms clasped round his breast, in such composure that scarcely could he be perceived to breathe. His soul seemed absorbed in God; and from the serenity, and 'something resembling splendour which appeared on his countenance and in all his gestures afterwards it might easily be discovered what he had been about.' Even in sleep the devotional habit still predominated, and 'his soul went out in groans and sighs and tears to God.' They bear witness to his rapts and ecstasies, and record circumstances which they them-

[1] Southey, vol. ii. p. 119.

selves believed to be proofs of his communion with the invisible world."[1]

If Walsh's religion had in it an ardour which rose to the level of passion, it was yet marked by a fine charity and sanity. This is how he discussed the Romish Church he had left:—

"I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, though not according unto knowledge. Many of them love justice, mercy, and truth; and may, notwithstanding many errors in sentiment, and therefore in practice (since as is God's majesty so is His mercy), be dealt with accordingly. But I freely profess that now, since God hath enlightened my mind and given me to see the truth as it is in Jesus, if I had still continued a member of the Church of Rome I could not have been saved. With regard to others I say nothing; I know that every man must bear his own burden and give an account of himself to God. To our own Master both they or I must stand or fall for ever. But love, however, and tender compassion for their souls constrained me to pour out a prayer to God in their behalf. All souls are Thine, O Lord God; and Thou willest all to come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved. . . . I beseech Thee, O eternal God, show Thy tender mercies upon those poor souls who have been long deluded by the god of this world, the Pope and his clergy. Jesus, Thou lover of souls and Friend of sinners, send to them Thy light and Thy truth that they may lead them."[2]

It is almost amusing to put side by side, as types of the wide range of character from which Wesley drew his helpers, John Nelson, the Yorkshire stonemason, and Thomas Walsh, the Irish carpenter's son. The one was a typical Saxon: square-headed, strong-bodied, with little imagination but with much humour; rich in the salt of common-sense, and with a command of homely Saxon speech which suggests John Bunyan or William Cobbett. Walsh represents the Celtic type, with its gift of imagination, its visions, its ardours, its touch of melancholy, its kinship to the spiritual world. Walsh had neither the strength of body, the sanity of intellect, nor the plodding common-sense of John Nelson. And Nelson could never have been the scholar, the dreamer, the mystic, such as Walsh was. He never rose to his fervours,

[1] Southey, vol. ii. p. 122. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

nor was touched by his melancholy. But both men were alike in the courage, the fire, the zeal with which they served Methodism, and proclaimed its message with their dying breath to crowds. And a religious movement which created, and used spiritual types so diverse, was surely very remarkable.

Wesley visited Ireland first in 1747, and betwixt that period and his death he crossed the Irish Sea no less than forty-two times. So successful was his work on Irish soil that in 1752 he held the first Irish Conference. It met at Limerick, lasted two days, the members consisting of John Wesley himself and nine of his helpers. The first Irish Conference, like the early English Conferences, spent much time in a vigorous examination into the theology of the helpers and their teaching; and the notes of the "conversations" are sometimes almost humorous in their directness and pungency. "How far do any of us believe the doctrine of Predestination?" runs one question. The answer to it is, "None of us believe it at all!" Some of the questions and answers have a local flavour. Irish congregations were apt to be talkative; so comes the question, "How shall we all set an example to the people of decency in public worship?" Answer: "First, let us constantly kneel at prayer, and stand during singing and while the text is repeated. Second, let us be *serious* and *silent* both while the service lasts, and while we are coming in and going out."

There is a local flavour, again, in another question and answer. "Should we not preach more expressly and more strongly on self-denial than we have hitherto done?" Answer: "By all means, in this kingdom more especially, where it is scarce ever mentioned or thought of." "What should we avoid next to luxury?" Answer: "Idleness, or it will destroy the whole work of God in the soul; and in order to this let us not pass one day without spending at least one hour in private prayer."

This was exactly the teaching, pungent, strong-fibred, practical, which Wesley's emotional converts in the south of Ireland, at least, needed. And such teaching, linked to evangelical doctrine of the most fervent type, and preached in the most fervent way, yielded in Ireland very remarkable fruits.

# CHAPTER XII

## ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

WHO wants to see in what strange, unguessed ways—in advance of all human plans, or independently of them—a great religious movement such as that of the eighteenth century spreads, may well study the story of how Wesley's work spread to America. The forces of the great movement flew across the wide Atlantic like burning sparks blown with the wind—the wind that bloweth whithersoever it listeth.

No human field could well be less promising—as far as spiritual conditions are concerned—than that offered by the United States of that day. It had the roughness of a new settlement, with the forces and institutions of civilised life only half developed. A scanty population was scattered over an immense geographical area, and what to-day are counted amongst the greatest cities of the world were then little more than villages. Philadelphia in 1739, for example, when Whitefield arrived there, consisted of only 2076 houses, representing a population of ten or eleven thousand persons. Whitefield, with his far-carrying voice, could have made himself audible to the entire population at once. Social life was in its crudest form; industrial life was only beginning to stir; the very institutions of religion, over large areas, had yet to be created. Franklin tells an odd story belonging to an older period, according to which some one was pleading with the Attorney-General of the day for a charter and funds to establish a college in Virginia, and he begged Mr. Attorney to consider that "the people of Virginia had souls to be saved as well as the people of England." "Souls," cried this great legal authority, "damn your souls! Make tobacco." And over wide tracts of primitive settlements that brusque and pagan counsel had been acted upon. People counted the business of "growing tobacco"—or its equivalents—much

more urgent and important than that of "saving their souls," if, indeed, they had any souls to be saved. Already, too, the political skies above the United States were black with the menace of the coming war with the parent State, a war which was to rend the Anglo-Saxon race in twain for unknown years.

The story of the first planting of Methodism on American soil is very curious. In 1752 Wesley visited an odd patch of German settlement from the Palatinate on the Rhine, in Ireland—a cluster of little villages, Ballingarrene, Killeheen and Courtmatrix. His visit resulted in many conversions and the creation of some Methodist Societies. Wesley records the visit without comment in his Journal; it was part of the day's work. And yet in that little community of German-Irish he had, all unknowing, planted seed out of which was to spring under other skies the great Methodist Church of the United States.

One of his converts was Philip Embury, who became a lay preacher; a man without any special endowment of intellect, yet his name—almost by chance—has become historic. Embury was one of a group of Irish-German emigrants to the United States in 1760. He settled in New York, but lacked courage to begin religious work there, and by a natural and inevitable reaction his own religious life began to die. Another party of these German-Irish emigrants, from the same neighbourhood, landed in New York the next year. Amongst them was Barbara Heck, a peasant woman of courageous character and an earnest Methodist. Her zeal kindled in womanly vehemence when she found the first party of emigrants had practically forgotten their Methodism. A familiar but doubtful story relates how she went into a room one day where Embury and his companions were playing cards. She seized the pack, threw it into the fire, and cried to Embury: "You must preach to us or we shall all go to hell together; and God will require our blood at your hands." "I cannot preach," stammered the rebuked man, "for I have neither chapel nor congregation." "Preach in your own house," answered Barbara Heck, "and to our own company." And so the first Methodist sermon in America was preached under a private roof and to a congregation of five persons.

It is sometimes said, in reference to this incident, by way of sneer, that American Methodism was "born at the card-table"; but there is evidence that Embury himself had not lost his Methodist habits and become a card-player.

The work begun in this fashion spread; a congregation was formed, a Society organised. To this congregation there came one Sunday a British officer in full uniform; he fell on his knees with the other worshippers, and joined in their singing when they rose. It was Captain Webb, of the 42nd, a gallant soldier who had been converted while listening to a sermon by Wesley at Bristol.

Webb was a soldier of distinction, and in many ways a remarkable man. He fought at the siege of Louisburg and was desperately wounded. A bullet struck him on the right temple, glanced down through the eye-ball and fell into his mouth, and in the shock of the wound Webb swallowed the bullet. "He is dead enough," was the comment of a comrade, as he stooped over him. But Webb, most indomitable of men, whispered back, "No, I am not dead." He lived to take a great part in a nobler warfare. He was with the tiny and heroic column that, at midnight on September 12, 1759, climbed the crevice in the cliffs which led to the Heights of Abraham, and in the fierce fighting next morning he saw Wolfe die and the strength of France in Canada shattered.

He was stout-bodied and broad-faced, and the green shade that hung over his eyeless socket gave to his broad features a peculiar look. He was in the habit of taking his sword into the pulpit with him and, before he preached, laying it on the table or desk. It was a bit of gallant steel, and with the battle-scarred face of the preacher above it never failed to impress an audience. John Adams, the second President of the United States, no mean judge of oratory, described Webb as "the old soldier, one of the most eloquent men I ever heard." Webb carried into his religion all the fine qualities of a soldier—courage, loyalty, enterprise. He became a local preacher, and was accustomed to go into the pulpit in full uniform. He was quartered with a detachment of his regiment at Albany, and hearing

of the little society at New York, came down the river, made himself known, and at once put the impulse of a new energy into Methodist affairs.

A woman leads the procession of converts to Christianity in Europe, the purple seller of Philippi; and a woman's figure, that of Barbara Heck, stands at the head of American Methodism. And beside her are the figures of two laymen—Embury the carpenter, and Webb the soldier.

The first Methodist chapel in America was built, Embury making the pulpit with his own hands, and preaching the first sermon in it, on October 30, 1768. It was a low building of stone, 60 feet by 42 feet, and was adorned with a fireplace and a chimney. This was done to evade the law which forbade the erection of other than Anglican places of worship. The work spread fast, and a letter was written to Wesley urging him to send them a leader, and adding that if the English Conference could not afford to pay the preacher's passage the members of the little Society in New York would sell their coats and shirts to provide the funds.

Wesley, it will be remembered, had a very definite and prudent strategy in his operations. He took short steps, and never went far from his base. He did not cross St. George's Channel till 1747, nor the Scotch border till 1751. To reach across the Atlantic to America seemed, to his prudent eyes, a policy, if not too daring, yet too hurried. When Wesley was urged, a little later, to visit America himself he replied: "The way is not plain; I have no business there so long as they can do without me. At present I am a debtor to the people of England and Ireland."

But the cry from America was very urgent. One pertinacious Methodist wrote:—

"Mr. Wesley says, the first message of the preachers is to the lost sheep of England. And are there none in America? They have strayed from England into the wild woods here, and they are running wild after this world. They are drinking their wine in bowls, and are jumping and dancing, and serving the devil in the groves and under the green trees. And are not these lost sheep? And will none of the preachers come here? Where is Mr. Brownfield? Where is John Pawson? Where is Nicholas Manners? Are they living, and will they not come?"[1]

[1] Southey, vol. ii. p. 202.

It was impossible to refuse that appeal, and the Conference of 1769 called for volunteers for America. Two helpers, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, offered themselves. They were not sent across the Atlantic with empty hands. The members of the Conference, the hardest worked and worst paid company of men probably at that moment in Great Britain, put their scanty coins together. It took £20 to pay the passages of the volunteers across the Atlantic, and they carried in addition the sum of £50 as a token of brotherly love from British to American Methodism. These two Methodist helpers thus set out with £50 to Christianise a continent!

The Conference of 1771 made a still more splendid contribution to the religious life of the United States. It sent Francis Asbury and Richard Wright to America; and Francis Asbury was certainly the noblest gift England ever bestowed on her children beyond the Atlantic. He has never yet come to his just fame, even in his own Church. It was in the year after Whitefield died that Asbury landed on American soil, and while this, as yet unknown, Staffordshire peasant had none of Whitefield's magnificent powers of oratory, he was destined to make a deeper and more enduring mark on the religious life of America than even the great preacher did.

This son of a peasant-household began to preach when a lad of eighteen. He went to America when he had been a travelling preacher for five years. He started on that historic pilgrimage, which was to lead him to goals unimagined, without a penny in his pocket. On the rough, vast floor of America he played the part of an apostle, without putting on the airs of one; without, indeed, in the least suspecting himself to be one. His travels rival, if they do not outrun, those of John Wesley himself, and they were maintained under far harsher conditions. He found his lodgings in the rough cabins of the pioneers; his track ran through shadowy and almost untrodden forests, over wide prairies, across unbridged rivers. His salary for the greater part of his life was under £20 a year. Tall and thin, his gaunt body had the toughness of steel, while his temper had the gentleness of a woman.

He was a Fletcher without that awful look of other

worlds which lay like a continual presence on Fletcher's brow; a Wesley without the masterful will and the obstinate High Church bias of his great leader. But Wesley himself could not have outridden, or outpreached, or out-toiled him; Fletcher's saintly life had hardly more of the atmosphere of prayer about it than that of Asbury. Prayer was woven into the very fibres of his life. He touched with its magic every person with whom he came in contact, if only for a moment. If he stayed a few days in some settler's cabin he had household prayer with every household meal. No visitor crossed the cabin threshold without being welcomed, or dismissed, with prayer. Asbury had not Wesley's genius for command, but he suited the American character and the conditions of American life better than even his great leader. He had no class prepossessions. He belonged to no political school. He had no stubborn High Church bias. And he held together, as perhaps not even Wesley could have done, the Methodist Societies in America during the bloody civil war, and he held them by force of the wise gentleness that love teaches.

For his only genius was that which love gives. In this respect he resembled Fletcher rather than Wesley. He was, in fact, an English and peasant version of that half-angelic Swiss. Asbury was half seraph and half peasant —a seraph with a touch of the peasant's homeliness added, and hardly less seraphic on that account.

Wesley, brief as was his personal intercourse with Asbury, had put upon him his characteristic stamp. It is still visible in his pithy, short-sentenced English. It was writ large before the eyes of his contemporaries in his neatness of dress, his methodical industry, his hunger for knowledge, and his student-like habits. This Staffordshire peasant, travelling five thousand miles a year, preaching incessantly, spending three hours a day in prayer, and without a settled home, yet had it as a fixed rule to read a hundred pages daily. He made himself a scholar, and mastered Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

To what mysterious order did such men belong? They seem to have possessed faculties which lie undeveloped in ordinary men, and to draw their life from richer fountains. What to other men are rare and momentary

experiences—high moods of emotion and of vision, which come and vanish at a breath—were to such men as Wesley and Fletcher and Asbury the permanent and ordinary conditions of life. They are revelations, indeed, of the unused and unsuspected forces which slumber in religion.

It is needless to assess Asbury's intellect. Love taught him wisdom, love gave him power. He reached by its charm heights of influence impossible to mere intellectual energy. He healed the schism of 1779–80 betwixt the Northern and Southern branches of the infant Methodist Church in America, not by his arguments, not by mere tact or authority, but by his tears and prayers, and by that love which shone in his tears and breathed in his prayers. A wifeless, solitary man; a rustic by birth, who owed nothing to the schools and little to natural endowment; who had no powers of debate, and seemed to have no gifts of leadership; yet, in the history of His Church, as God sees it, and writes it, and will crown it, not many figures stand higher than that of the peasant bishop of Methodism in the United States—Francis Asbury.

Wesley, shrewd judge of men as he was, scarcely realised at first Asbury's pre-eminent gifts. He had recognised, it is true, the gentleness which was the characteristic note of Asbury's character, but had hardly discovered the strength and sagacity which underlay Asbury's gentleness. And Wesley had a general's instinct. He believed that in the shaping of a new Church on the rough soil of America a strong hand was needed; and in 1773 he despatched Thomas Rankin and George Shadford as reinforcements to America. His letter of commission to Shadford is characteristic: "I let you loose, George, on the great continent of America. Publish your message in the open face of the sun, and do all the good you can."

Rankin, who figures familiarly as "dear Tommy" in Wesley's letters. was a Scotchman by birth, a soldier by training—a soldier of John Haime's school—and Wesley made him general assistant of the Societies in America for the express purpose of drawing more tightly the reins of discipline there. Rankin certainly brought to his

religion something of the temper, and very much of the discipline, of a soldier. Even the gentle Asbury, where principle was concerned, was known to have a hand of iron; but Rankin's touch was of wrought steel! His sense of order was so profoundly shocked by the physical manifestations which attended some revivals that he was tempted to quarrel with the revivals themselves. He carried the peremptory accents of a trooper into the Society gatherings, and for a time it seemed as if the gentler-natured Asbury, with the finer and wiser influences he represented, would be driven from the field. Æsop's fable of the contest betwixt the sun and the wind was illustrated afresh, in a word, by the contrast betwixt the methods of the two men; and, as in the historic fable, the gentle sunshine of Asbury's genius proved more effective than the hard and blustering wind which Rankin's administration suggested.

Methodism, from the first, grew with almost tropical rapidity on American soil. It suited the genius of the people. It exactly fitted their circumstances. An itinerant ministry, as mobile and as enterprising as the light cavalry of an invading army, spread over the whole vast continent. The first preachers brought the methods of Wesley, and the traditions of the earliest heroic group of his helpers, to America. They outmarched the immigrants; they out-toiled the settlers; they carried the message and the spirit of religion everywhere. And year by year the tale of new Societies, of multiplying chapels, and of an ever-expanding army of helpers, was reported to the British Conference.

Asbury greatly contributed to this by the skill of his administration. He had many of the gifts of a great commander. He knew how to choose men; he could look over a whole continent and see its strategic points, and place everywhere exactly the man that suited the post. He knew, too, how to suit the temper and genius of a preacher to the exact spiritual stages of each Society; and with all his gentleness Asbury had enough resolution to act on his own reading of the situation. He distributed his helpers over the continent on the method, and with much of the skill, by which a great general distributes his troops.

And yet Methodism in America was at first sadly handicapped. Civil war was on the point of breaking out. The first Conference in America met on July 14, 1773, but the historic meeting of Coke and Asbury in America, on November 14, 1784, marks the starting point of the great Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States. But, only four months before, the Declaration of Independence had been signed, and the bond which united the colonies to England was severed. To found a new Church on a soil shaken with a political earthquake of this scale was a task which might well seem too great for the wit of man to accomplish. But something wiser than human wit, and mightier than human strength, went to the task.

The helpers Wesley had sent across the Atlantic were, of course, English or Scotch by birth; their sympathies were with their native land; they shared Wesley's obstinate loyalty; and they were, not unnaturally, suspected of being "unpatriotic," not to say anti-American, by their own flocks. Wesley, on the other side of the Atlantic, was declaring at that very moment that he would as soon associate with a drunkard or a whoremonger as with rebels. With what eyes could Rankin, the ex-cavalryman, with more than a soldier's instinct for discipline and a soldier's hate of disloyalty, look on rebels? One by one Wesley's early helpers were driven out of America. The preachers were, later, required by Congress to take the oath of allegiance to the new Government, and even the all-patient Asbury refused to do this. He was fined £5 for preaching without taking the oath, and was practically silenced for two years, and in hiding for part of the time. The unhappy effects of the civil war are reflected in the Minutes of the English Conference. For ten years—ten sad, troubled years—1773–1783—there is no record of the American work in them. It had disappeared! The red furnace of war seemed to have destroyed it. For eleven years —1773–1784 — no published Minutes of the American Conference made their appearance.

Wesley, it may be added, greatly increased the difficulties of his helpers in America by his political utterances in England. In 1775 he issued a little pamphlet of

four pages, entitled "A Calm Address to our American Colonies." Never before or since, perhaps, did so small a bit of printed paper produce such a sensation. Over 40,000 copies were sold in a few weeks. The pamphlet moved the almost tearful gratitude of the members of the British Cabinet, astonished to find a man of Wesley's knowledge of the common people, and influence with them, on their side; but it deeply offended all who were opposed to the war, and brought on Wesley himself a tempest of abuse. His friends in America tried to suppress the pamphlet there, and burned all the copies that reached American soil. Wesley bluntly declared in his pamphlet that the Americans had no grievances, and had been robbed of no rights. The British Parliament, he argued, had power to tax the American settlements, and the revolt was at bottom not a struggle for freedom, but an attempt to overthrow the monarchy.

Now the "Calm Address" was, in fact, simply Johnson's well-known pamphlet "Taxation no Tyranny" abridged, and adorned with Wesley's name and a few sentences of Wesley's nervous English. Its publication, in this form, laid Wesley, not unreasonably, open to the charge of plagiarism. The pamphlet, too, was in sharp contrast with some of Wesley's earlier utterances. He had, for example, on June 15, 1755, addressed a very noble letter to Lord North, protesting against the treatment to which the Americans were subjected. He wrote:—

"All my prejudices are against the Americans; for I am a High Churchman, the son of a High Churchman, bred up, from my childhood, in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance; and yet, in spite of all my long-rooted prejudices, I cannot avoid thinking, if I think at all, that an oppressed people asked for nothing more than their legal rights, and that in the most modest and inoffensive manner that the nature of the thing would allow. But waiving all considerations of right and wrong, I ask, is it common-sense to use force towards the Americans? These men will not be frightened; and, it seems, they will not be conquered so easily as was at first imagined. They will probably dispute every inch of ground; and, if they die, die sword in hand."[1]

[1] Tyerman, vol. i. p. 198.

These are admirable sentiments; but while Wesley wrote in this fashion in private, how did he come to write so differently in public? The truth is that in politics Wesley was apt to speak on half knowledge, since he was too busily occupied in a greater realm to be able to master all the facts belonging to a world so different. In political matters, too, his natural bias, both of training and character, made him what was called in those days a Tory. Only when his conscience became peremptory did his political views correct themselves.

It can be easily understood how Wesley's utterances in England increased the difficulties of his preachers in America. But Wesley, it must be said, was far wiser for his preachers than for himself. Thus he wrote to them:

"It is your part to be peacemakers; to be loving and tender to all, but to addict yourselves to no party. In spite of all solicitations, of rough or smooth words, say not one word against one or the other side; keep yourselves pure; do all you can to help and soften all; but 'beware how you adopt another's jar.'" In the same spirit Charles Wesley wrote to them, saying, "As to the public affairs, I wish you to be like-minded with me. I am of neither side, and yet of both: on the one side of New England, and of Old."[1]

The ecclesiastical situation in America quickly came to a crisis—a crisis which hastened the solution of the same difficulty in England itself. Wesley required his helpers in America, as in England, not only to keep on terms of friendship with the Church of England, but to regard themselves as her humble and unrecognised servants. They were not to administer the sacraments, to hold services in church hours, or to label themselves Dissenters. But the number of clergymen in the United States was few; their parishes were vast, and they were too often men without either zeal or piety. It was absurd to expect the energetic and fast-multiplying Societies of Methodism to depend on the charity—too often the grudging and ungenerous charity—of a few Anglican clergy for the administration of the sacraments.

The civil war, as a matter of fact, wrecked Wesley's

[1] Southey, vol. ii. p. 210.

whole policy in this matter. Most of the Anglican clergymen abandoned their parishes and fled from the revolting colonies. The administration of the sacraments, as far as Wesley's Societies were concerned, threatened to become —over wide spaces it did actually become—a lost and almost forgotten thing.

The question of the sacraments thus became, in America, urgent and peremptory. Wesley appealed to the English bishops to ordain some of his helpers to meet the crisis, and was refused. English bishops had no over-tender anxiety to supply the ordinances of religion to rebels at war with their mother country and their legitimate sovereign. Wesley wrote to the Bishop of London: "I mourn for poor America, for the sheep scattered up and down therein; part of them have no shepherds at all, particularly in the northern colonies; and the case of the rest is little better, for their own shepherds pity them not."

Wesley, with characteristic patience, waited for four years before he acted. He wrote twice to Lowth, the Bishop of London, a man of liberal mind and generous sympathies, begging ordination for a single preacher who might travel amongst the American Societies and administer the sacraments. But Lowth refused. "There are three ministers in that country already," he said. "And what are these," was Wesley's natural reply, "to watch over a continent?" Not only were they too few in number; they were visibly unfit in character for the work they had to do. Wesley wrote to Lowth:—

"Your lordship did not see good to ordain him [Wesley's helper], but your lordship did see good to ordain and send into America other persons who knew something of Greek and Latin, but who knew no more of saving souls than of catching whales."

Facts with Wesley had always a final logic. He, by this time, had begun to look at the whole situation with eyes purged of High Church prepossessions. It was as well, perhaps, he reflected that the bishops had not ordained his helpers.

"If they would ordain them now (he wrote) they would expect to govern them; and how grievously would this entangle us! As our American brethren are now totally disentangled, both from

the State and the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church; and we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free."[1]

He determined to solve the difficulty by ordaining a superintendent or bishop for America. Wesley acted deliberately, and puts with great force the reasons that weighed with him. Why did he do for America what he refused to do for England? He replies:—

"Here there are bishops who have a legal jurisdiction. In America there are none, either any parish ministers; so that, for some hundreds of miles together, there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's Supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order, and invade no man's right, by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest."[1]

Accordingly Wesley, with Creighton, a clergyman who was also one of his devoted helpers, ordained Coke as superintendent, Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as presbyters for America. Coke in turn was to ordain Asbury. Wesley, after his practical fashion, would go as far as he must, but no further. His principles, it is true, ran far ahead of his acts; but he was the unimaginative Englishman who kept his feet on the solid earth and cared much for the concrete and nothing for the abstract; much for practical efficiency and little for logic. Alike in England and America, he strained to the breaking-point the loyalty of his people in his desire to keep on terms with the Anglican Church. In America, for example, in 1779, the Methodist Churches in the Southern States deliberately broke loose, and resolved to begin existence as an independent Church, since in no other way could they secure the administration of the sacraments amongst themselves. The schism was only healed by Asbury's prayers and tears and matchless tact.

Wesley's characteristic tenderness for the High Church theory his intelligence had long ago renounced, and which he was in the very act of publicly repudiating, is amus-

[1] Southey, vol. ii. p. 213.

ingly shown in the very ordination of Coke. He will not name him "bishop," though he is making him one, but labels him "superintendent." It was American directness and common-sense which later thrust aside the clumsy word "superintendent," and made the name and the fact to agree by the use of the term bishop. Wesley, too, at another point was illogical. Lord King, he declared, had satisfied him that presbyters and bishops were the same order. Why, then, did he think it necessary to ordain Coke as bishop under the alias of "superintendent"? Southey's criticism at this point is perfectly sound. On Wesley's principles the consecration was useless, for Dr. Coke, having been regularly ordained, was already as good a bishop as Wesley himself.

Coke was almost as splendid a gift to America as Asbury. His tact, his zeal, his overpowering personality, at once made him a power; and it may be added that a gentleman by birth and position, and a scholar by training, he had a social position to which Wesley's other helpers could not pretend. Asbury was on a country tour at the moment of Coke's arrival; but just as Coke had finished preaching at a chapel in Delaware "a plain, robust man came up to him in the pulpit and kissed him, pronouncing at the same time a primitive salutation." This was Asbury; and the two men who were to impress so profoundly the religious life of the United States at once became the closest friends.

It does not fall within the scope of this book to further describe the progress of the work in America. Methodism there was but an offshoot of the English revival, planted on strange soil, under strange skies, and under harsh conditions. Yet it has grown to be the greatest and most vigorous branch of English-speaking Protestantism history knows! Its geographical and political conditions gave it the form of an independent Church earlier than even the parent movement in England; and it is to-day the most powerful religious body in a nation of eighty millions. If Wesley's work had to be judged by this, in a sense, one of its secondary results, how great is its scale!

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE SECRET OF THE GREAT REVIVAL

Up to this point the range and scale of the revival have been described; but it is worth while to ask at this stage what is the explanation of a movement which so profoundly affected the whole nation; and where the secret of its strange energy is to be sought.

The secret, of course, belongs to the spiritual realm. It is idle to seek for it in the personal qualities of the men who were its agents, in the overwhelming oratory of Whitefield, the hymns of Charles Wesley, the ordered and matchless industry, the genius for organisation, of John Wesley. Nor does the explanation lie in the realm of doctrine. England in the eighteenth century was not revolutionised by the discovery of a new theology, nor yet by the force of an old theology set in a new perspective and proclaimed in new accents. The revival of the eighteenth century, it is customary to say, is the supreme historical re-birth of evangelicalism amongst the English-speaking race. And that is true; but it is not the whole truth. The most evangelical reading of theology is, in itself, a powerless thing. It will not save an individual, much less influence a nation.

In its last analysis the secret of the great religious movement here described is to be found in a rich outpouring of the living Spirit of God on the nation; and in the circumstance that at this particular moment that Divine Spirit found, in a particular group of men, fit instruments, with fit measure of devotion and faith, for a work so great. Flowing through the channel of true doctrine, and using the agency of fit human instruments, the grace of the Holy Spirit wrought this great work.

But the question still remains, what was that particular reading of Christianity which the revival represents, and

which serves to explain its scale and its enduring energy? What are evangelical doctrines?

The Christian religion, as all history shows, lies open, perpetually, to danger from two opposite extremes. One extreme resolves it into a pale and attenuated Deism, a theory which exhausts all the great words of Christianity of their meaning, and all the great offices of Christ of their reality. It ignores—it treats as non-existent or as insignificant—that dread and measureless interval, a moral gulf, which no wit or toil of man can bridge, betwixt sin and righteousness. Sin, on this reading, is merely a stage in human development. It has no enduring element of guilt, and is pursued by no eternal penalties. Forgiveness, if any forgiveness indeed is necessary, comes through no awful mystery of suffering running up to the very person and throne of God. It is a cheap and easy thing, the mere gift of God's good nature. Conversion is a phrase. Christ's priesthood is, if not an impertinence, at least an irrelevance; for man needs no priest. A divine redemption accomplished through sacrifice is unintelligible. Christ has no redeeming offices. He is simply a teacher, a little wiser than, say, Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius; or even perhaps not quite so wise! Religion is a little scheme of moral reform, accomplished easily by the unaided energy of the human will.

This theory evaporates the Bible into a mist; it drains its supreme passages of all meaning. It is a creed which inspires no martyrs, creates no saints, sends out no missionaries, writes no hymns, and has little use for prayer. Jesus Christ, in its scale of values, is merely a Jewish Confucius. The denied, or the forgotten, offices of Jesus Christ—of Christ the seeker, of Christ the redeemer—are the reproach of this theory of religion and the secret of its weakness. And, as we have seen, this was the version of Christianity which, at the moment when the great revival began, had captured all the pulpits, and nearly all the mind, of England.

The opposite misreading of Christianity is the sacerdotal version in all its moods and forms. It does not deny Christ's priesthood, but betwixt the personal human soul and the great High Priest of the human race it puts the barrier of a human priesthood. Redemption, in this

reading of the Christian system, is robbed of its freeness, of its simplicity, of its amazing grace. Religion becomes a scheme of measured and mechanical duties; of pious efforts regulated by a clock, and undertaken in a temper of bondage. The sacerdotalist, when analysed, is a man who has never heard the great message of Christianity to each accepted and forgiven soul—"Thou art no more a servant but a son." On the sacerdotal theory, divine grace flows exclusively through the "lean and scrannel pipe"—to borrow a Miltonic phrase—of a particular line of ordained men. This is a theology which suits the austere and select few, but has no message for the common crowd. It inspires great earnestness, but kindles no sunshine. It sometimes evolves martyrs, but it never makes a rejoicing saint.

These opposite misreadings of Christianity stand in sombre contrast with that great system of evangelical belief which comes betwixt them both, and avoids the falsehood of each. What are evangelical doctrines? A chain of mountain peaks, that pierce to the crown of the heavens, and on whose summits brood perpetual sunshine! They constitute a close-knitted succession of truths that break out of eternity and have its scale—truths that relate to sin, and proclaim its measureless guilt, its hurrying and inevitable doom; but which also reveal an immediate and personal deliverance from sin—a deliverance which comes as an act of divine grace, and on the simplest terms of penitential acceptance. But it is no light and easy deliverance which costs the Deliverer nothing. It is the supreme miracle of the spiritual universe, made possible only by the mystery of Christ's redemption. It is brought near by the mystery of the Holy Spirit's grace. It sets the forgiven soul in personal and rejoicing relationship with a reconciled and loving Father.

A divine redemption; a realised pardon; a restored relationship to God through faith; the entrance of supernatural forces into the life by the grace of the Divine Spirit; the present and perfect attainment of God's ideal in the character. And all this made intelligible and credible by the redeeming work and offices of Jesus Christ—and by the saving energies of the Holy Spirit in

the human soul! This is the evangelical version of Christianity!

There is nothing new in these doctrines. They represent no theological discoveries. But they are the effective doctrines of Christianity. They differentiate it from a mere scheme of morals. They make it something more than a theology. They directly bear on character. All the dynamic energies of Christianity find their spring in them. These are the doctrines that send out missionaries, that inspire martyrs, that regenerate slums! They awaken deeper vibrations in the human soul than all other truths put together. They are the doctrines in which dying men find comfort. All the great hymns of Christian worship reflect them; all the great prayers of human need give them speech. They formed exactly the message which the dying Christianity of the England of that day needed. "Men," the message ran, "are in utmost and instant peril; they need, not some new and heavier chain of duty, but a divine deliverance accomplished through redeeming grace. And this salvation is possible. A Saviour walks amongst men, touching them with hands of tenderness. Hope is born! All men may be saved here and now."

No other preachers painted sin with colours so dark, and yet so true to human consciousness, as did the men who carried this message. None depicted God's love in Christ in such radiant sunshine, or proclaimed Christ as a Saviour in tones so confident. These doctrines, too, were preached by men who had verified them. They had brought them to that ultimate test of all religious theories, the forum of conscious experience. They were not advocates, they were witnesses. Every syllable on their lips rang with those accents of reality which no art can feign. They challenged their hearers to an immediate and personal verification of the truths they proclaimed.

And in the speech of these men thrilled that strange power which uses human logic and emotion as its instruments, but which is something different from them all and greater than them all—the power of the Holy Ghost; the "power" that first made human speech its vehicle at Pentecost, and has never been lacking since in those who have learned the secret of Pentecost.

Is it any wonder that such a gospel—preached by such men, in such a spirit, and at such a critical moment —accomplished what is nothing less than a moral revolution? It permanently changed the very currents of religious history.

But it may be asked, Did not Wesley preach at least some strange and startling doctrines of which sober Christianity knows nothing, or at least knows only doubtfully? The whole question of the theology of the revival is discussed later, but it may be asked here, What were those two great doctrines of "assurance" and of "perfection" with which the names of the Wesleys and of Whitefield are associated, and which in the judgment of multitudes still discredit their work and blot their fame?

That these doctrines are still suspected only proves how imperfectly the Christian religion, after nineteen centuries of Christian history, is understood even in Christian lands. The doctrine of perfection, as Wesley taught it, is only the belief that God's ideals in redemption for the human soul are capable of being realised, and realised here and now. It is the doctrine that the highest possibility of religion is not struggle merely, but victory; that what God demands, man, with the help of God's grace, may give. The first and great commandment, that sums up in its brief syllables all human duty, is—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength." Is that to be for ever, and for the souls which Christ has redeemed, and in which the Holy Spirit dwells, a law unfulfilled; a challenge to the human conscience unanswered; its pain and condemnation? To assert this is to say that the Christian religion, when translated into the terms of human life and experience, is a failure. It is to say that God's ideal and man's character must be for ever in discord. This surely is a theology of despair; a doctrine which is but a disguised atheism.

There were, no doubt, many strange and wild misreadings of the doctrine of perfection in Wesley's time; but as he held it, and taught it, it is a very sane and Scriptural bit of theology, and its rejection is the denial, not only of man's hope, but of God's grace.

What, again, was that doctrine of "assurance" which

to the wondering ears of multitudes in that day, seemed a new and wild heresy; and which is still a thing suspect —or at least uncomprehended—by multitudes in the Christian churches to-day? On Wesley's lips, it was, of course, only a reassertion of one of the forgotten offices of the Holy Spirit. It was one of the essential gifts of the Christian religion drawn into the sunlight from the realm of musty and ancient forgetfulness. Pardon, he taught, was to find its verification and seal in the consciousness of the pardoned soul. God's forgiveness was not to lie always in the realm of doubt, a dark and perplexed uncertainty; at best only a trembling hope; for most men, indeed, a fear-haunted problem which only death could solve. "The Spirit itself," ran the message of the great revival, "bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God." Why should that which was the gladness of the Christian consciousness in the first century, be the despair of the Christian consciousness in the eighteenth century?

And the doctrine of assurance, as Wesley taught it, was an appeal to the human consciousness. Forgiveness, he insisted, wrought in the human soul a divine peace which was its witness and seal. Alas! that this great doctrine to-day, as in all days, finds a reflex so faint in the personal experience of multitudes who are yet trying to follow Christ. By so much has human narrowness denied to God's grace some of its sweetest offices!

It is worth noting how steadfastly, from the moment of his conversion to his dying breath, Wesley kept his own experience and teaching within the shining curves of evangelical belief. In them he himself, a wearied sacerdotalist, found deliverance. He tells the tale of the long despair which had lain like a blight on his life; of the spiritual weariness of those thirteen sad years betwixt his entrance into the ministry and his conversion. He was convinced, he writes in 1738, that the cause of his spiritual disquiet was unbelief, and that "the gaining of a true faith was the one thing for him." He had faith, indeed, of a sort, but, he says, "I fixed not this faith on its right object. I mean only faith in God, not faith in or through Christ." Those words touch the very kernel of this evangelical theory!

Wesley, as we have seen, found deliverance when he came into personal touch with Christ as a personal Saviour. Justifying, saving faith in the light of that great experience he defines as "a full reliance on the blood of Christ as shed for *me;* a trust in Him as *my* Saviour, as *my* sole justification, sanctification, and redemption." The saving emphasis lies on the pronouns! Then Wesley tasted the gladness of that blessed experience he calls "assurance." "An assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and delivered me from the law of sin and death."

Wesley for the rest of his days, we repeat, kept on the high lands of evangelical belief and experience. He found in evangelical doctrines the keynote of all his sermons. The text of his first open-air sermon was the passage, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor." More than fifty years afterwards he preached at Leatherhead his last discourse from the text, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near." The text on which he preached most frequently is that passage which declares how God in Christ is "made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Almost his last whispered sentences as he lay dying consisted of the words, "There is no way into the holiest but by the blood of Jesus." Who masters the meaning of these words will understand what is that evangelical doctrine which was the special message of Wesley to his generation, and is indeed the great proclamation of Christianity to all generations.

Wesley himself is almost more remarkable as a witness to these truths than as a worker or leader. Paley has built on the conversion of Paul an almost matchless demonstration of the truth of Christianity itself. The moral transformation, sudden and permanent, of a strong, proud, passionate nature is one of the most remarkable facts in human history. To transform a zealot, at a breath, into a saint, a persecutor of Christianity into a martyr for the truths of Christianity—this is a miracle! An event so amazing must have behind it a cause not less wonderful. And this is the problem in Wesley's history.

What explains the difference in the two stages of his own experience—the doubt-tormented sacerdotalist of early years, and the radiant saint of later years? Up to May 24, 1738, Wesley wore his religion as a monk of the thirteenth century might have worn his hair-cloth shirt. It was a task, an anguish, a burden. But on that date he suddenly stepped into a realm of certainty, of freedom, of gladness.

That great hour at the humble meeting in Aldersgate Street was certainly the turning point in Wesley's career. It marks the dividing line of his life. On one side are struggle, doubt, toil, failure. On the other side are certainty, gladness, power, achievement. Something happened in that supreme moment which explains the change. It was Wesley's conversion. He received the living Christ by personal faith as a living and personal Saviour; and the sublime ideals of redemption, as they exist in the mind and purpose of God, were fulfilled in him.

But it may be said that this was a purely subjective experience; valid, perhaps, for its subject, but of authority for nobody else. What conclusion, having authority for mankind at large, can be drawn from the subjective experience of a solitary human soul? Nor, perhaps, does it strengthen the case to argue that Wesley's experiences were repeated in thousands of other souls. Multiply a cipher no matter how often, it remains a cipher.

But the change in Wesley was not merely subjective. It took concrete form in his life. It registered itself in history. It has the scale and permanency of history. How was it that he, who in 1727 could not move a village, after 1739 could shake three kingdoms? How did it come to pass that the teacher who was driven out of a little colony as a mere human irritant became the teacher, the comforter, the trusted leader of whole generations?

The explanation certainly does not lie in any personal gifts of body or brain Wesley possessed. These were exactly the same at both stages of his career. Wesley at Wroot was twenty-five years of age. He had then the scholar's brain, the zealot's fire, the orator's tongue; and he failed—failed consciously and completely. "I

preached much," is his own record, "but saw no fruits of my labour." Wesley, again, in Savannah, was thirty-two years of age. At no stage of his life did he show a higher passion of zeal, or more methodical and resolute industry; a self-sacrifice so nearly heroic in temper. And yet he failed!

But something came into his life by the gate of his conversion, something he never lost, something which transfigured his career. It was a strange gift of power—power that used Wesley's natural gifts—his tough body, his keen intellect, his resolute will—as instruments, but which was more than these. Who looks on Wesley's life as a whole, and sees on one side of a particular date doubt, weakness, and defeat; and on the other side certainty, gladness, and matchless power, cannot doubt that the secret of Wesley's career lies in the spiritual realm. Wesley's story is simply one embodied, historic, and overwhelming demonstration of the truth of what is called the Evangelical reading of Christianity.

# CHAPTER XIV

## HOW WESLEY AFFECTED ENGLAND

It seems a daring and extravagant thing to measure the work of a single life by the changes that life has wrought in the character of a nation. The most commanding human figure, when set against the background of a kingdom, may well seem dwarfed into microscopic dimensions. In some rare cases, as with Peter the Great in Russia, Cavour in Italy, or Bismarck in Germany, a test so high may be applied without any startling sense of disproportion. But in English history, such a test, when applied even to Pitt or to Gladstone, seems too cruel.

In the case of Wesley, many of the ordinary elements of power were visibly lacking. He was to the day of his death a poor man, if only because he gave away everything he possessed. He was, at the moment when his career takes the scale of history, a clergyman without a charge, a leader without a party, a preacher with every pulpit in the three kingdoms shut against him. Yet when all this has been said, it remains true that Wesley may challenge the judgment of mankind by the test of the mark his work has left on the history of the English-speaking race.

And his contribution to that history may be compressed into a single sentence. He restored Christianity to its place as a living force in the personal creed of men and in the life of the nation. A change profound and wonderful, carrying in itself the pledge and the secret of a thousand other changes! For more than fifty years—from the moment he broke through all ecclesiastical conventions and preached on the open moors at Kingswood to the rough miners, down to the moment speech failed on his lips in the death-chamber in City Road—Wesley was the greatest personal force in England. And he was a force for all that Christianity means.

He had a spiritual vision as keen as that of Thomas

à Kempis; a sense of eternity as profound as that of William Law; spiritual convictions as overmastering as those of John Henry Newman, and in infinitely closer harmony with the essential genius of Christianity. And he was not, like the author of the *Imitatio*, imprisoned in a cell. He was not, like Law, wrapped in cotton wool by a cluster of rich feminine admirers. He was not, like Newman, buried in semi-monastic seclusion at Littlemore. He lived in the open air. He turned the hill-side and the city street into a pulpit. He preached to vast crowds daily; he touched thousands of lives by his personal influence; and he did this for more than fifty years! He gathered round himself a great order of preachers of a quite new type. He built up a far-stretching spiritual organisation embodying his own ideals, and on fire with his own spirit. As a result he quickened the conscience, not merely of his own followers, but of the Church which had cast him out, and of the whole nation to which he belonged. Christianity, not merely as a creed, but as a conscience, was in this way re-born under British skies.

The range and character of Wesley's work may be judged by the tests of history. And when those high tests are applied it can be soberly claimed for Wesley that he did not so much revive the evangelical tradition of Christianity; he created it! He made it a permanent element in the religious life of England. All great evangelistic movements, from his time down to the present day, have had in them a breath of Wesley's spirit. And the evangelical tradition which dates from Wesley, it may be added, is of the sanest and most practical type.

There is a current platitude just now that the next revival must be ethical. If so, it will be a return to Wesley; for the revival which bears his name was ethical in the most intense and practical fashion. Religion, as Wesley defined it, and enforced it, consisted of godly tempers and godly conduct. Even Leslie Stephen, who, in the matter of theological belief, is parted by whole horizons from Wesley, and who tries Wesley's work by purely literary tests, bears emphatic testimony to the practical qualities of that work. Wesley's aim, he says, was "to stamp out vice, to suppress drinking and de-

bauchery, to show men the plain path to heaven." It was, in other words, to set up in human life that *Civitas Dei* of which all the saints have dreamed, a true and imperishable Kingdom of God, a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Lecky, in a score of passages, notes, with a certain accent of admiring astonishment, the influence of the Methodist revival outside Methodism. It was one of the forces which produced Sunday-schools. It affected the army, the Universities, literature, and this in spite of the fact that the chief literary men of the day had nothing for it but sneers. It is not easy to recite the countless practical forms which Wesley's work took. He set up a dispensary with free supply of medicine to the poor; he fought against political corruption; he established relief employment for the destitute. Says Lecky, "It is no exaggeration to say that Wesley had a wider constructive influence in the sphere of practical religion than any other man who has appeared since the sixteenth century."

All the great and characteristic contributions to Christian life in modern days come, in brief, by direct descent from Wesley. And the indirect influence of his work—its reflex on other bodies than his own — is, perhaps, greater and more wonderful than even its direct fruits. The Anglican Church, for example, cast Wesley out. It rejected his work. Yet the Anglican Church of to-day is profoundly influenced by Wesley. He created a new conscience in that Church. He awakened a spirit which killed silently and absolutely, as a breath of pure oxygen kills some microbes, the idle and unspiritual clergy of his day, who had attenuated Christianity into a sort of Chinese morality—mere Confucianism with a Christian label—and who were more alarmed at the suspicion of believing too much than of believing nothing at all. Wesley, preaching on his father's tombstone outside Epworth Church, made impossible the drunken vicar inside. The spectacle of the vast open-air crowds that hung on Wesley's lips made the empty churches for ever intolerable.

Wesley's influence outside his own Church runs sometimes in strange and unrecognised channels. It called into existence, no doubt, the great evangelical school in

the Anglican Church. But it also helped to create the opposite school. The Oxford Movement, if only because it was served by more splendid literary talents, outbulks in scale and importance for a considerable section of mankind Wesley's revival. No one as yet has adequately traced the connection betwixt the two movements; and yet the connection is undeniable, and constitutes a striking, if almost unrecognised, example of the reflex influence of the great revival. Wesley, in a sense, explains Newman and made him possible.

There are the oddest resemblances and contrasts betwixt the two men. Newman was born ten years after Wesley died, and so drew his earliest breath in the new religious atmosphere Wesley created. Newman, indeed, frankly acknowledges his debt to the revival. "The writer," he says, "who made a deeper impression on my mind than any other, and to whom, humanly speaking, I almost owe my soul, is Thomas Scott." But Scott was the disciple of Newton, and Newton was converted under Whitefield, and the line of spiritual connection betwixt Newman and the revival at this point is clear. Unlike Wesley, Newman was an evangelical first, and a sacerdotalist afterwards. He came under Law's influence as a mere boy; he was "converted" in an evangelical sense at fifteen, and of that inward conversion he says in his *Apologia*, nearly sixty years afterwards: "I am still more certain than that I have hands and feet."

But though the order of events is inverted in the lives of the two men, the correspondences are wonderful. Newman, it is true, was an evangelical, not of Wesley's, but of Whitefield's school. He was a Calvinistic evangelical, that is; and when, like Wesley, he made the discovery, in his own words, that "Calvinism is not a key to the phenomena of human nature as they occur in the world," he gave up, not merely Calvinism, but the whole evangelical theory as well. Newman was, perhaps, more credulous than even Wesley. Wesley believed in "Old Jeffrey"; but Newman, as a youth, thought he himself was an angel and the solid earth about him a dream. "I thought," he records in his *Apologia*, "life might be a dream or I an angel, and all this world a deception, my fellow angels by a playful

device concealing themselves from me, and deceiving me with the semblance of a material world." Nature was a parable for him, Scripture an allegory.

The two men both held Fellowships at Oxford; both were familiar figures in the historic pulpit of St. Mary's, and both went, though in an inverted order, through the same theological stages. Both men were, in turn, mystics, ascetics, sacerdotalists.

But where Wesley met Peter Böhler and stepped through the shining gate of faith into the land of spiritual freedom, Newman met Pusey and went through the narrow doors of sacerdotalism into the shadow-haunted realm of a false theology. Wesley was thirty-two years old when he sailed for America, and before Moravian influences had touched him. Newman was thirty-two years old when he parted from Froude at Rome on his way to Sicily, and when on the narrow Sicilian waters he wrote his hymn—"Lead, Kindly Light." If the two men had met, how exactly they would have understood each other! And with what equal eyes of approval Archbishop Laud would have looked on them both! They were both his ecclesiastical offspring.

Wesley would have fought for the apostolic succession and for the integrity of the Prayer-book as fiercely as Keble or Newman. He would have thrust all dissenters out of both the realm of his own charity and the Kingdom of God with a scorn as complete as theirs. With his Oxford companions he might have set up, instead of the Holy Club, a semi-monastic house at Littlemore, exactly as Newman did a century later. Sacerdotalist, mystic, and ascetic, we repeat, can be found in each of them.

But Newman is an arrested Wesley. Could Wesley, like Newman, have forsaken Anglicanism for the Church of Rome? His habit of unsparing logic, his courage in hanging life, death, and eternity on a syllogism, makes that possible. The sacerdotalist, indeed, who does not end by becoming a Roman Catholic is an example of arrested logic, a mere incomplete syllogism in flesh and blood. Newman's argument is flawless: "To believe in the Church"—in the sacerdotal sense—"is to believe in the Pope." Wesley, in 1745, would, no doubt, have found

it harder to join the Church of Rome than Newman did in 1845. Romanism in the middle of the eighteenth century was, for an Englishman, linked to a hated system of politics. It stood for Charles I. against Hampden; for the Stuarts against the House of Hanover; for the Star Chamber against the Bill of Rights; for James II. against William of Orange. And these things counted even for a sacerdotalist. Had Newman himself lived a hundred years nearer the trial of the Seven Bishops it would have made his surrender to the Papacy more difficult.

The difference in their religion finds its expression in the different atmosphere of the two men. Wesley's atmosphere is radiant with sunshine; Newman's is a sort of sunless mist. Let any one compare the over-subtle logic, the indefinable note of weariness which runs through Newman's "Grammar of Assent," and the exultant energy, the gladness, the accent of triumphant certainty in, say, Wesley's "Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion," and he will find expressed in literary terms the spiritual interval betwixt the two men. Newman never escaped from that sacerdotal treadmill in which Wesley toiled for thirteen years. He only changed its direction. Religion, Newman says in his "Grammar of Assent," is "a system; it is a rite, a creed, a philosophy, a rule of duty." But he did not add with Wesley, It is a life; nay, it is a partnership in the highest form and energy of Life, the life of God Himself! Religion for Newman, whether at Christchurch or at Littlemore, was a matter of "prescribed rites embodied in institutions." For Wesley, it was the inrush of supernatural forces out of the spiritual realm, flooding every channel of human nature.

But it is curious to note how profoundly Newman and Wesley agreed as to the validity of the spiritual consciousness. Wesley, from first to last, tested religion in the forum of his consciousness. Newman, following Kant, rested his belief in God on the witness of his own consciousness. We have, he asserted, "a direct and conscious knowledge of our Maker." He found in the indestructible facts of consciousness the one force capable of resisting the all-dissolving scepticism of the intellect in the realm of religion. "Personality," in Newman's philosophy, was "the key to truth." Dr. Barry, his best biographer, says:

"Metaphysicians commonly started from the universal to arrive at the particular; but he who is not of their sect reverses the process. 'Let the concrete come first,' Newman argues, 'and the so-called universals second.' He went back to the days of his childhood when he was alone with the Alone, and on this adamantine basis of reality he set up his religion."

In principle, it will be seen—in the value assigned to personality—Newman and Wesley are alike; but Wesley did not "go back to his childhood" in search of God. He found a constant witness to the existence of God living within him. His doctrine of the witness of the Spirit is but a form of this great philosophy.

Wesley was saved from sacerdotalism by the touch of his mother's hands; by the influence of Moravian teaching; and beyond even these forces by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Yet he had a narrow escape. He might have been an eighteenth-century Newman! And though it sounds a paradox, it is sober truth that Wesley at Oxford, in 1730, made Newman at Oxford, in 1830, possible. Wesley left the sacerdotal camp, but the breath of his zeal made even those dry bones live. He created a new conscience in sacerdotalism, and from that new conscience, stirring like some strange wine in old bottles, came the whole Tractarian movement of the Thirties.

High Church Anglicanism stands to-day on that *via media* to which Newman led it, and at which point he abandoned it. It would probably scorn the suggestion that it owes any debt to Wesley. It certainly displays no sense of obligation to the Church which Wesley founded. And the Roman Catholic Church, too, would smile at the notion that it owes Wesley anything for the gift of Newman. And yet, if the indirect influences of Wesley's work are followed, it will be seen that the debt is undeniable. If Wesley called into existence a new Church, he stirred into life the conscience of the Church he left.

If we come down to later times, no one will deny that the touch of Wesley's hand, the breath of his spirit, is in the modern Church. The Salvation Army is one aspect of Wesley's work—his work amongst the fallen and the outcast—revived under modern conditions and in a picturesque shape. The Christian Endeavour Societies

are Wesley's great institution of the class-meeting translated into modern terms and made to serve new uses. All the great city missions springing up under every sky have in them the very spirit of Wesley. If modern religion is learning to take social forms, if it is expressing itself in terms of practical beneficence, this, too, is part of the tradition caught from Wesley. For he first, amongst the religious teachers of England, charged religion with social offices. There is hardly a form of practical beneficence the world knows to-day that Wesley did not set into operation. It is a secular historian like Lecky who says: "Not only the germs of almost all the existing zeal in England on behalf of Christian truth and life are due to Methodism, but the activity stirred up in other portions of Protestant Europe we must trace, indirectly at least, to Wesley."[1] And it is a writer of Newman's school, Palmer, who declares that "the bold, aggressive movement, of which Wesley was the symbol, once more made Christianity the teacher of the world."

But we are discussing now the effect produced upon national life and character by Wesley's work, rather than any ecclesiastical change it wrought; and it is difficult to write on this without seeming to exaggerate. What was it that saved England from "the red fool-fury of the Seine," and kept her undestroyed while the wild forces of the Revolution were shaking throne and Church in France into ruin? Maurice tells how his father was accustomed to say that "England escaped a political revolution because she had undergone a spiritual revolution"—that brought about by Wesley and Whitefield; and Lecky's testimony to the same fact is emphatic. "Many causes," he says, "conspired to save England from the contagion of the revolutionary spirit in France, but among them a prominent place must be given to the new and vehement enthusiasm which was at that very time passing through the middle and lower classes of the people."[2]

It is historically certain that English Deism helped to produce the French Revolution. The English Deists supplied Voltaire and his school with arguments, and

[1] Lecky, vol. ii. p. 521. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 636.

in France these arguments found a soil in which they struck deep root; or, to vary the figure, they acted as sparks cast into some inflammable vapour. But why did the very teaching which, although a foreign importation, produced such effects in France, fail completely in England, its native soil? The answer is to be found in Wesley and the revival linked to his name. If Wesley had been an English Voltaire, corroding all belief with the acid of his wit, and distilling the gall of his bitter spirit into the blood of the nation, there might have been a Reign of Terror in London as well as in Paris!

Let it be remembered that at this time a new social movement—the rise of the great manufacturing industries of Great Britain—was shifting the whole centre of national life. It was a movement which has yielded splendid results, but its birth was attended with the gravest social perils. It was a movement of disintegration, disordering the social relations of whole classes. It altered the very type of national life. It increased the sum total of wealth, but totally changed its distribution; it made, for a time at least, the rich richer, the poor poorer. It kindled a war which has not since found a truce betwixt Labour and Capital. It drew together all the inflammable elements of the nation. It tended to weaken if not arrest moral forces, and to substitute for them forces non-moral and anti-social—greed of money, class jealousy, selfishness. Lecky describes it as "peculiarly fortunate" that the emergence of this great social phenomenon in England should have been preceded by "a religious revival which opened a new spring of moral and religious energy among the poor, and at the same time gave a powerful impulse to the philanthropy of the rich." But was it merely a stroke of "peculiar good fortune" which explains the appearance, at this supreme and critical moment in national history, of the great Methodist revival? It was the providence of God, the working of that divine Will which shapes human history to the pattern of the divine counsels.

Sometimes in nations, as in individuals, the creed has no relation to the conscience. But the great revival made Christianity authoritative on the moral sense of the nation, and in that august change lay the secret of

a thousand other changes. Who watches the emergence of that new force in English history, and traces its workings in the national life, has the key to nearly everything noble in modern British legislation.

There were of course many forces which, for the moment, postponed, or obscured—though they did not destroy—the growth of those seeds of justice and goodness which the revival planted on the soil of English character. The Great War with France, for example, had been in progress for ten years when Wesley died, and it lasted ten years after his death. How profoundly that war, both during its course and after it had closed, deflected the national life is not easily realised. As one result Parliament remained unreformed, and utterly failed to reflect the national conscience. It is difficult to-day to realise the evils of the old electoral system. Two-thirds of the House of Commons were simply appointed by rich men. The Duke of Norfolk owned eleven members, Lord Lonsdale owned nine. Old Sarum had two members, but not a single inhabitant. Seventy members were returned by thirty-five electorates which, all put together, counted hardly as many voters. Three hundred members, it was estimated, were returned by 160 persons, while great cities had not a single member.

Under such conditions, the better ideals which Wesley's work had created could not find expression in public law. Legislation was partial, justice was still brutal. There were still 253 capital offences on the Statute-Book. If a man injured Westminster Bridge he was hanged; if he cut down a young tree, if he shot a rabbit, if he stole property valued at five shillings, he was hanged. So late as 1816 there were at one time in Newgate fifty-eight persons under sentence of death, one of them a child of ten years old. Romney tells the story of two men, partners in the same offence, who were tried for robbery. One man moved the pity of the jury. They found him guilty of robbery to the extent of 4s. 10d.; the other was found guilty of theft to the extent of 5s., and that extra twopence was for one man fatal. It measured the difference betwixt life and death! Cruelty, in brief, ran through the whole gamut of social life. Women worked in coal-pits, crawling like animals on hands and feet in the darkness of the mine.

Children of six were habitually employed. Down to 1804 the rights of working men to combine were regulated by a law passed at the date of the battle of Bannockburn. More than one-half of the entire children of England grew up without education.

Taxes were inevitable; but the system of taxation was cruel, and stupid to a degree almost incredible. Salt was taxed to the extent of forty times its cost, and on the coast the poor used sea-water to take its place in cooking. Paper was taxed threepence per pound, newspapers fourpence per copy, advertisements three shillings and sixpence for each issue. The law, that is, was used to kill the very opportunities of knowledge. England, too, was cursed in the latter years of the eighteenth century by a lunatic king and a distracted regency; and later by a monarch, George IV., who would have been less of a scandal to the nation if he *had* been a lunatic.

And all this was after Wesley had quickened the conscience of the nation, and poured the wine of a new humanity into its veins! Why was that new conscience so late in making itself effective? For an answer, let the disturbing forces we have recited be considered; the distractions of the Great War, the mischiefs of a vicious system of politics, the influence of a corrupt court, the persistence of ancient and cruel forms of legislation; and it will be understood how even the new conscience which Wesley had created in the nation found late and imperfect expression in public affairs.

Wesley's convinced and passionate opposition to slavery is historic, and it is the more remarkable because it was so much in advance of the sentiments of his age. The British Parliament during the eighteenth century, it must be remembered, passed no less than twenty-three Acts of Parliament benevolently "regulating" the slave traffic. By the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) Great Britain undertook to furnish annually to South America 4800 negroes, and to do this for thirty years; and the contract was renewed in 1748. Great Britain, that is, ignobly turned, on this gigantic scale, slave-provider for the Spaniard! And it was not the political conscience merely that was utterly without sensitiveness to what Wesley described "that sum of all villainy," the slave trade; the clerical conscience

was equally torpid. A great ecclesiastical dignitary, the Bishop of London, in a pastoral issued in 1727, declared that "Christianity and the embracing of the Gospel does not make the least alteration in civil property," even though that "property" consisted of human flesh and blood!

When at last a reform of the franchise made Parliament a true expression of the national conscience then came the great procession of humanitarian Acts. The revolt against the slave trade, and Howard's reform of the prisons, were the earliest and happiest expressions of the new conscience thus created. The new sense of justice, of human equality, of the dignity and worth of human nature, which went with the Great Revival found expression in the reform of the courts, the purification of the criminal code, the great Reform Bill of 1836, and the humane legislation linked to the name of Shaftesbury. Wesley and the Evangelicals generally were against Catholic relief, and against the repeal of the Test Act—a fact which proves that they were imperfectly emancipated from the evil conditions of their own times, and that intelligence in them did not keep pace with conscience. But the principles they taught, and the new spirit they introduced into national affairs, were powerful dissolvents, in which the cruel legislation of earlier years—legislation which undertook to make injustice the guard, and cruelty the servant, of religion—disappeared.

A century, it may be added, is but a hand-breadth in the life of a nation. Let the vision take a wider range, and it will be seen that betwixt the England of 1703 and the England of 1903 there is the most amazing difference. The little cluster of islands, with its scanty fringe of quarrelling colonies, has become an empire whose flag floats over one-fifth of the surface of the planet, and almost one-fourth of the human race. But the difference in scale and power which marks the empire is even less impressive than the advance in its ideals and temper. A new conscience has been created; a new humanity breathes throughout society; new ideals of legislation register themselves on the Statute-Book. Great Britain has many problems still unsolved, many characteristic evils yet unvanquished. But let it be set in

the perspective of history; let it be measured against the great empires of other days. And with all its imperfections it is certain that it more nearly approaches the ideals of Christianity than any other community in which men have ever dwelt together.

To the creation of this freer and nobler England a thousand forces have co-operated. But if that tangled web of contributing forces be disentangled, the richest and strongest are those which belong to religion. And who will deny that, of these, the most influential and effective are those which gather round Wesley and the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century! And the secret lies not so much in the man, as in the message; not in the teacher, but in the thing taught; not in the human agent, but in the spiritual forces of which he was the channel.

# BOOK IV

## THE EVOLUTION OF A CHURCH

# CHAPTER I

## WESLEY AS A CHURCH-BUILDER

In a life such as Wesley's a point is at last reached at which its relation to history has to be determined. The story ceases. to be biography, and becomes, in some large and permanent sense, history. Let Wesley be pictured in mid-career as he stands, say, preaching to a crowd of 10,000 people at Moorfields, or to one of 20,000 at Gwennap Pit, and let him be looked at, say, through John Nelson's eyes. The honest Yorkshireman had no gift of imagination and no trick of literary picturesqueness. He can only describe what he sees, but he sees with curiously direct and uncoloured vision. We have already quoted his vivid account of the first time he heard Wesley preach; how "as soon as he got upon the stand he stroked back his hair and turned his face towards where I stood, and I thought he fixed his eyes on me. His countenance struck such an awful dread upon me before I heard him speak that it made my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock, and when he did speak I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me. When he had done I said, 'This man can tell the secrets of my heart.'"

This, says Southey, was Wesley's secret of power as a speaker. He never generalised. He spoke not to the crowd, but to the individual.

"The preacher's words were like the eyes of a portrait which seemed to look at every beholder.

"'Who,' said the preacher, 'Who art thou, that now seest and feelest both thine inward and outward ungodliness? Thou art the man! I want thee for my Lord! I challenge thee for a child of God by faith. The Lord hath need of thee. Thou who feelest thou art just fit for hell, art just fit to advance His glory—the glory of His free grace, justifying the ungodly and him that worketh not. O come quickly! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou, even thou, art reconciled to God.'"

Multiply a scene like this, and utterances like these, through half a century, and over the whole area of the United Kingdom! Here is visibly a man who is moving a nation. He is a man, too, who can translate his message into terms of literature, and write it in imperishable words. Here is a passage, for example, from his "Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" which may be taken as an example of the character and force of his teaching:—

"Faith . . . is with regard to the spiritual world what sense is with regard to the natural world. It is the . . . feeling of the soul whereby a believer perceives the presence of Him in whom he lives, moves, and has his being, and indeed the whole invisible world, the entire system of things eternal. By this faith we are saved from all uneasiness of mind, from the anguish of a wounded spirit, from discontent, from fear, and sorrow of heart, from that inexpressible listlessness and weariness both of the world and ourselves which we had so helplessly laboured under for so many years—especially when we were out of the hurry of the world, and sunk in calm reflection. This we know and feel, and cannot but declare, saves every one that partakes of it both from sin and misery, from every unhappy and every unholy temper—

> 'Soft peace she brings; wherever she arrives
> She builds our quiet, as she forms our lives;
> Lays the rough paths of peevish nature even,
> And opens in each heart a little heaven.'"

But is all this mere air-drawn rhetoric? Is it that suspected, dreaded, hated thing, "enthusiasm"? No! Wesley claims it is the highest form of reason. It belongs to the realm of certainties:—

"We join with you [*i.e.* the men of reason] in desiring a religion founded on reason, and every way agreeable thereto. But one question remains: What do you mean by reason? I suppose you mean the eternal reason, the nature of things, the nature of God, and the nature of man, with the relations necessarily existing between them. Why, this is the religion we preach—a religion evidently founded on, and every way agreeable to, natural reason, to the essential nature of things: to the nature of God, for it begins in knowing Him, it ends in doing His will: to the nature of man, for it begins in a man's knowing himself to be what he

truly is, foolish, vicious, miserable. It goes on to point the true remedy for this, to make him truly wise, virtuous, and happy, as every thinking mind (perhaps with some implicit remembrance of what it originally was) longs to be. It finishes all by restoring to due relations between God and man; by uniting for ever the tender Father and the grateful, obedient son, the great Lord of all, and the faithful servant, doing not his own will but the will of Him that sent him."

Such a man, we repeat—with such a message, and such energy to deliver it—is from any point of view a great figure. He must profoundly affect his generation.

But there is nothing necessarily permanent in his work. The orator's voice is hushed; the crowds are gone, the emotions the ringing words awakened are dead. Who to-day reads the "Appeal," even though it stands unmatched for force in the religious literature of its century? Had Wesley done nothing more than preach or write, his memory might have faded. But at this stage Wesley links himself by one great achievement, not merely to English history, but to the history of religion. He creates a Church! He did not do this consciously, or of deliberate purpose. He strove, indeed, not to do it; he protested he would never do it. But as history shows, he actually did it! And since history is not so much philosophy teaching by examples as God interpreting Himself by events, we are entitled to say that Wesley, in laying the foundations of a new Church, did something that, no doubt, outran his own human vision, but which fulfilled a divine purpose.

To destroy a Church is easy. But to build one is a task requiring not only the highest gifts of intellect and the richest endowments of spiritual energy, but a combination of external circumstances and forces such as does not often occur in human history. To set up a sect is not difficult. Small men can do it; small passions make it possible. A quarrelsome temper, a loud voice, and a sufficient absence of humour to enable the performer to take himself seriously — to announce at the top of his voice, for example, that he is the reincarnation of Elijah or of John the Baptist—these are qualities and performances that, for a time, will generate a sect. But

a Church, a true province of the spiritual kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, within whose bounds millions of devout souls may dwell; a Church which creates and trains a ministry, sends out missions, builds great institutions, and lives with a life that grows ever richer while generations pass—this is one of the great things of history. Its origin does not, indeed, belong to the category of human forces. Its secret and explanation lie in the divine realm. And that Wesley, without deliberately intending it, built an indestructible Church is the fact that gives to his career the scale of history.

Each Church is an attempt to translate Christianity into a working formula; and Wesley added one more such formula to the spiritual history of the race. And it is a formula which endures! No one can write a history of Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and leave out Methodism.

Whitefield stopped short of this great achievement. He was a greater preacher than Wesley; but he was only a preacher, and so his biography never takes the imperishable scale and range of history. Charles Wesley lives by his hymns. He found a vehicle for the religious emotions which Churches of every name and type accept and use, and will continue to use till the sound of the last earthly hymn melts into the eternal harmonies of heaven. But this, in the case of Charles Wesley, was but an accident of spiritual genius. What place in history, again, would Ignatius Loyola have apart from the great religious Order he created? Wesley's fame is imperishable because, somehow, he created an imperishable institution.

And in the story of Wesley's work nothing is more remarkable than the narrow limits of time within which the movement he inspired crystallised into definite form, a form which, as though shaped by unseen hands to unseen ends, had the prophecy and the assurance of enduring existence. Wesley, as we have seen, spent thirteen sad, slow, blundering years in solving the problem of religion for himself. But having solved it, the whole of his life instantly gained a certain swiftness of movement and certainty of goal it would be difficult to match in religious history. And in five brief, hurrying years—

years full of controversies and distractions—he practically shaped, and shaped for all time, the Church which bears his name. Two wonders, indeed, are visible in this aspect of Wesley's work; the absence of any clear intention to create a Church, and yet the swiftness, the sagacity, the certainty of aim and stroke, with which that work was actually done.

A cluster of dates in the almanac—dates covering only five years—will serve to show with how little of delay, of uncertain experiments, of wasted efforts, a great Church was evolved :—

"1739—*April* 2.—Wesley preaches his first open-air sermon at Kingswood. *May* 12.—Foundation of first Methodist preaching place laid at Bristol. *June.*—Foundation of school laid at Kingswood. *October* 15.—Wesley sets out for Wales, beginning his itinerancy. *November.*—First Methodist preaching house, the Foundry, opened in London; first Methodist stewards appointed; first hymn-book published; first Methodist Society formed; first lay preacher, Maxfield, employed.

"1740.—Wesley separates from the Moravians; controversy on Predestination with Whitefield begun; the theology of Methodism shaped.

"1742—*February* 15.—Societies divided into classes; first mention of class-leaders. *April.*—First watch-night in London; quarterly visitation of classes by preachers established; tickets of membership used.

"1743—*May* 1.—Rules of the Society published.

"1744—*June* 25.—First Conference met in London."

Here, compressed into a dozen lines, and into five brief years, is Methodism in all its essential features, in clearest outline. During the 160 years which have passed since, Methodism has witnessed many changes in form, but absolutely no change in principle. These great formative years determined what is characteristic and vital in it. The first Methodist Conference in history assembled on June 25, 1744. It consisted of only ten men. Its record includes a description of "The Society and its Officers," which might stand to-day, with some changes in names, for contemporary Methodism.

The secret of the swift, definite, and symmetrical evolution of Methodism in a period of time so brief is found,

in the main, in Wesley himself; and it is curious to note how much of the fitness which lies in unconscious natural genius, as well as of the fitness which comes of equally unconscious education and training for the work of a Church-builder, Wesley had. These five great shaping years found Wesley, for one thing, at the high-water mark of energy and power. They cover the best years of his life, say from thirty-six to forty-one. All the apparently wasted experiences of his career now found their office and use. His equipment of knowledge was singularly wide. To the discipline of a godly home, of a great public school, and of an ancient University had been added the experiences of a new settlement in America, and the teaching of the Moravian settlements in Germany.

Wesley, as we have seen, had personally gone through the whole gamut of possible religious experience. He was familiar with all schools of religious thought. He knew Protestantism in its two great forms — Anglican and German. He was familiar, indeed, with every school of theology and every variety of ecclesiastical use. He knew men, cities, books, churches, history. No development of human nature and no turn of ecclesiastical polity found him unprepared.

Wesley's temperament helped him, as well as his training. He was not of the French but of the English type. He cared little for theories and much for facts. He was always willing to be wiser to-day than he was yesterday. He dealt with difficulties as they arose, and not till they arose. He had many prejudices, and they were of a robust sort; but he only kept a prejudice so long as it agreed with facts. This side of his character finds an almost amusing illustration in the way in which he dealt with what was, to him, the alarming phenomenon of a layman preaching. He heard at Bristol that his helper, Maxfield, had crossed the mystic border line which separates an exhortation from a sermon, and the story has already been told of how Wesley rode post haste to London to trample out the first sparks of what might prove to be a conflagration. His mother's calm eyes and quiet speech arrested him. She made the one appeal which, to Wesley's reason and conscience alike,

was irresistible. This new and alarming phenomenon must, after all, be judged by the question: "Does God use it?"

Wesley looks clear-eyed at the facts. They are in conflict with the mental habits of a lifetime, and with that most obstinate of all forms of human prejudice, the bias of an ecclesiastic. But the facts are plain. God visibly blesses the preaching of this layman, and Wesley instantly surrenders his opposition. "It is the Lord," he says; "let Him do what seemeth Him good." And so he gave to Methodism one of the supreme secrets of its strength, the partnership of laymen with ministers in the great business of preaching.

There was in Wesley, with all his daring and enthusiasm, no touch of the fanatic's scorn of prudence. Few men ever lived who excelled him in the wise adaptation of means to ends. At the first Methodist Conference in 1744, what may be called the whole strategy of the revival was discussed. The question was proposed, "What is the best way of spreading the Gospel?" The answer is, "To go a little and a little farther from London, Bristol, St. Ives, Newcastle, or any other Society, so a little leaven would spread with more effect and less noise, and help would always be at hand." There speaks the practical genius of a true leader of men! Wesley, it is clear, would have made a great soldier. In military terms, he kept touch with his base. He did not merely overrun a district; he took possession of it and entrenched himself in it.

And not only by training, and by the practical bent of his genius, but by the nature of his beliefs, Wesley at this stage was admirably fitted for giving shape to a new Church. Most Christians have an easy, careless belief that the Holy Spirit once dwelt in the Church and shaped its history; but the unspoken addition to that belief is that He dwells in it no more. His gracious offices are nineteen hundred years distant! Now Wesley believed with enthusiastic certainty that the Holy Ghost was in the world on whose soil he trod, and was inspiring the life and shaping the development of the Church about him. That the offices of the Holy Ghost belong not merely to history, but to biology, is a great and

fruitful belief carrying with it strange consequences; and it is much rarer than we quite realise.

"Antiquity" is a word of irresistible authority to many good people, but they discover antiquity at the wrong point. In the true sense, "antiquity" lies about us! The Church of 1744, when Wesley put his impress on religious history, was nearly eighteen centuries older than the Church of apostolic days; and unless God's education of His Church had utterly failed, it ought to have been illuminated with richer light and nearer the divine ideal. Certainly the offices of the Holy Spirit in the Church of to-day may be expected to be, not scantier, but ampler, than in the first century. And Wesley learned to see the movements of that divine Spirit in the events about him, in the experiences of his converts, in the strange forces which drew such vast crowds to his preaching, and in the waves of emotion which swept over them. He recognised the guidance of the Holy Spirit, too, in the dim, half-seen outlines of the great institution—Society or Church, Wesley himself hardly knew which—taking shape about him.

If the movement, again, be looked at as a bit of human history, it is clear that many of the features of Wesley's work were determined by forces outside himself, and represent not his choice, but the imperative compulsion of events. He was an outdoor preacher, for example, by mere necessity. The churches were shut against him; he could find no pulpit but the open moor, the street corner, his father's gravestone.

How much open-air preaching shocked Wesley's prejudices as a divine and his fastidiousness as a scholar is proved over and over again. He demands of his brother clergymen what would induce them to face the discomforts and dangers of this strange service:—

"'Who is there among you,' he says, 'that is willing (examine your own hearts) even to save souls from death at this price? Would not you let a thousand souls perish rather than you would be the instrument of rescuing them thus? Can you bear the summer sun to beat upon your naked head? Can you suffer the wintry rain or wind, from whatever quarter it blows? Are you able to stand in the open-air, without any covering or defence, when God casteth abroad His snow like wool, or scattereth His

hoar-frost like ashes? And yet these are some of the smallest inconveniences which accompany field-preaching. For beyond all these are the contradiction of sinners, the scoffs both of the great, vulgar, and small; contempt and reproach of every kind—often more than verbal affronts—stupid, brutal violence, sometimes to the hazard of health, or limbs, or life. Brethren, do you envy us this honour? What, I pray you, would buy you to be a field-preacher? Or what, think you, could induce any man of common-sense to continue therein one year, unless he had a full conviction in himself that it was the will of God concerning him. Upon this conviction it is that we now do for the good of souls what you cannot, will not, dare not do.'"[1]

In the same way, by the mere compulsion of events, Wesley became an itinerant preacher, though most of his habits, all his prejudices, and some of the deepest instincts of his nature were opposed to it. There was in Wesley's very blood a semi-monkish love of solitude; and had he been by accident of birth and training a Roman Catholic, he certainly, at one stage of his career at all events, would have found his retreat in a cell. When the brothers returned from America, his brother writes, they "were resolved to retire out of the world at once, being sated with noise, hurry, and fatigue." All he asked on this side of eternity was solitude. "We want nothing, we look for nothing more in this world." Whitefield strongly urged Charles Wesley to accept a college living. To become a pair of ecclesiastical vagrants, hastening from village to village, and preaching to an unending succession of accidental crowds, was the last thing of which the brothers dreamed. "We were dragged out again and again," says Wesley, "to preach at one place and another, and so carried on we knew not how, without any design but the general one of saving souls, into a situation which, had it been named to us at first, would have appeared far worse than death."

Wesley, in brief, was an itinerant *malgré lui*. There were, of course, great historic precedents for an itinerant ministry, ranging from the early Saxon bishops down to the mendicant Orders of the Roman Church and the chaplains of Edward VI.—of whom John Knox was one.

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 292.

In Cromwell's time the proposal to turn all the parish ministers of England into itinerants was only lost in what is known as the "little" Parliament by two votes. Wesley, however, was moved to undertake an itinerant ministry, not out of any regard to ancient precedent, but by the actual necessities of the work he had undertaken.

But these two features of that work—open-air preaching and the itinerant nature of his ministry—determined many other things. They determined, for example, the general question of Wesley's relation to ecclesiastical order. For that order he had been, and still was, a zealot; but he was slowly learning that there were things more precious, as well as more urgent, than mere ecclesiastical use and wont. England was mapped out, for example, into parishes; and were these faint lines of ecclesiastical boundaries, drawn by human hands and guarding fancied human rights, to arrest such a work as Wesley was beginning? They were like films of cobweb drawn across a track of an earthquake! And many an ecclesiastical cobweb of the same kind had to be brushed aside to make room for the new religious life beginning to stir in Great Britain.

Wesley was curiously quick to seize each suggestion that events offered him. He never ran before Providence, and never lingered behind it. And his nimble intellect, while he worked, glanced through all history, his wide knowledge discovering everywhere helps, analogies, guides. When, for example, the most characteristic of all Methodist institutions, the class-meeting, suddenly emerged, as if by happy accident, Wesley recognised its values and possibilities; but he recognised, too, the historical analogies of the institution. It was not merely, in Wesley's words, "the very thing" the Church at that moment wanted; it was the re-emergence in modern form of the fellowship the apostolic Church once possessed.

Who studies, in a word, Wesley's genius, training, and beliefs will cease to wonder that, in a period so brief, and apparently with no sense of the greatness of the work he was doing, he determined, and determined for all time, the essential characteristics of the great Church that bears his name.

For the equipment of a Church, to sum up briefly,

great forces must be enlisted, great plans formed. Methodism looked at as a Church in process of evolution needed a theology, a philosophy, a discipline; and Wesley, without formally proposing these special tasks for himself, had undertaken them. He found his theology in the Bible, his philosophy in the correspondence of its truths to human character, and his discipline in the application of common-sense to the actual facts of the moment. Herbert Spencer has defined science as "organised knowledge"; and a Church, as Wesley saw it and planned it, might be defined as organised religion.

# CHAPTER II

## THE BREACH WITH THE MORAVIANS

The first equipment of a Church is its theology. It stands for some one special reading of Christianity, and its theology, by its accent and perspective, expresses that reading. And it may be said, generally, that the difference betwixt the theologies of the various Christian Churches is mainly one of accent, and of angle of vision. Now the theology of the Methodist Church was decisively shaped by three great controversies which belong to its early years. Who studies the history of Wesley's work will see that on its very threshold lay the certainty of these controversies.

Wesley was a devoted son of the Anglican Church, ordained to its ministry, a convinced believer of its doctrines, a passionate lover of its ritual. But he owed his spiritual life to the Moravians. Whitefield was his closest comrade, and in some fields of work his leader. And in each of these relationships was hidden a latent and profound discord sure to register itself in open controversy.

By the necessity of its genius, and by the stamp of Wesley's strong character put upon it, Methodism, it was certain, must be English, and not German, in type. It could not be a Church of mystics and dreamers. The pulse of an energetic and practical morality beat in its very blood. Sooner or later, therefore, it must break with Moravianism, with its dreamy quietism, its mysticism, shading off into the deadliest form of Antinomianism.

Whitefield, again, was a satisfied and even an exultant Calvinist. The doctrine that Christ did not die for all men was, in his own words, "the children's bread"; he would not give it to the dogs. But Wesley was a reasoned and convinced Arminian. His theology at this point had been settled by his mother's homely sense and spiritual

insight. That all men were included in the great sweep of God's fatherly love and of Christ's redeeming purpose was for him the first of certainties. He had no gospel for himself, or for anybody else, if this was not true. Was Methodism to be Calvinistic or Arminian in its theology? This great issue had to be determined, and the discord betwixt the two great comrades on this point made a far-reaching controversy inevitable.

Then the Anglican Church of that day had forgotten the spiritual elements of Christianity. It put form before fact. It resolved religion into a scheme of human ethics that had no divine force behind it, or in it. It was content to be the Church of a comfortable and tiny minority. Its clergy cared much for the few sheep within the episcopal fold, and much, too, for the wool on their backs; but they had ceased to even remember the sheep in the wilderness. All the divinest elements of Christianity—its passion of pity for the lost, and its exultant faith in the supernatural—had perished. How were such great opposites to be reconciled? How could the new and strong wine of Methodism be retained in a wineskin so dry and ragged?

Was Methodism, in a word, to be German or English in type; Arminian or Calvinistic in theology; a mere scheme of decorous moralities or a living religion, with the pulse of a supernatural life beating passionately in it? Controversy was inevitable at each of these points. The dispute with the Moravians was the struggle between a religion that expressed itself in an energetic morality and a religion drowsed with more, and worse, than the fumes of poppies. The long debate with Whitefield was a conflict between two irreconcilable readings of Christ's Gospel. The controversy with the Anglican Church was the quarrel of fire with ice. It meant the affirmation that spiritual fact is more than ecclesiastical form, that religion is not a mere form of social police, a system of what may be called Chinese moralities. It was a battle for the spiritual reading of Christianity.

Now Wesley himself took short views. He was content to do each day's work within the day, and never troubled himself with the problems of to-morrow. He perhaps had no clear vision of the fundamental discords which

lay hidden in his relations with those about him, nor of the theology waiting to be shaped by controversy. So he stood, all unconscious, on the verge of inevitable disputes; disputes with the Church of his infancy, with the guides who had led him to Christ, with his own closest comrade in the work he was doing. These controversies, it will be seen, determined for Methodism the temper of its morality, the colour of its theology, the form of its Church order.

In October 1739, Philip Henry Molther, a Moravian minister, came to London on his way to Pennsylvania. He was a man of many gifts and of intense—if narrow—piety; and the Society in Fetter Lane—the common centre of the new spiritual movement—at once fell under his influence. He remained in London till the following September, and during these few brief months Methodism and Moravianism were rent asunder for ever.

There was a deep mystic strain in Molther's genius. His vision of evangelical truth was intense but narrow, and even distorted. Truth is often of a scale too large for the tiny curve of human vision; and in partial truth there is deadly peril. Heresy itself is often truth only half seen, or seen in distorted perspective. Molther's errors represent only a want of equipoise in his theology; but their practical results were gross, and even deadly. Christ, he taught, was for a believer everything; "all beside was nothing." And in the catalogue of things dismissed as "nothing"—as irrelevant, or even evil—were the ordinary duties of Christian morality and the simplest acts of Christian worship. Molther taught that there were no degrees in faith. Who had not perfect faith had none at all. The single duty of a man wanting faith was "to be still," and do nothing. The very means of grace to him were hindrances—not to say sins. "An unbeliever, or one who has not a clean heart, ought not to use them at all; ought not to pray, or search the Scriptures, or communicate, but to 'be still'; and then he will surely receive faith, which, till he is still, he cannot have."[1]

In the "stillness" in which an unbeliever was to wait the entrance of Christ into his soul he was not to go to

[1] Journal, June 22, 1740.

church, not to read the Scriptures, not to use private prayer, not to do temporal good, not to attempt to do spiritual good. The soul, in a word, was to dwell in a spiritual and self-manufactured vacuum till Christ came to it.

All Christian ordinances, on this theory, lost their obligation and even their utility. Those who were without faith must not use them; those who had faith need not. To those outside the spiritual household they were hindrances, to those inside they were impertinences.

This is plainly a doctrine in quarrel alike with commonsense and with the elementary laws of morality. As held by Molther himself, and the group of fellow-mystics at that moment about him, it might not produce any failure in practical morality; but when filtered through minds of coarser fibre—and bodies of stronger appetites—the moral risks of such teaching were inevitable and tremendous. As a matter of fact, Molther's teaching produced instant and visible mischief. It disturbed the peace of the Societies. Charles Wesley describes the effect on those who accepted the new theology: "Lazy and proud in themselves, bitter and censorious towards others, they trample on the ordinances and despise the commands of Christ."

Wesley hastened back from Bristol to check the course of this evil. He found the Society full of strife and confusion—its perplexed members driven, many of them, to their wits' end. "I was," he says, "utterly at a loss what course to take, finding no rest for the sole of my foot. These vain janglings pursued me wherever I went, and were always sounding in my ears." He describes in his Journal the evil change Molther and his teachings had already wrought on the meetings at Fetter Lane. "Our Society," he says, "met at seven in the morning and continued silent till eight." "At eight," he records on another occasion, "our Society met at Fetter Lane. We sat an hour without speaking, the rest of the time was spent in dispute." He writes again: "In the evening our Society met, but cold, weary, heartless, dead. I found nothing of brotherly love amongst them now, but a harsh, dry, heavy, stupid spirit. For two hours they

looked at one another when they looked up at all, as if one-half of them were afraid of the other."

It is almost amusing to notice how Wesley resented being called down from the high levels of spiritual service in which he was walking, to this sad controversy. And the Moravian heresy shocked his common-sense by its pretence of superfine spirituality. It soared in realms too high for him. He writes in his Journal:—

"My soul is sick of this sublime divinity. Let me think and speak as a little child! Let my religion be plain, artless, simple! Meekness, Temperance, patience, faith, and love, be these my highest gifts; and let the highest words wherein I teach them be those I learn from the Book of God!"

With characteristic frankness Wesley proceeded to discuss Molther's teaching with Molther himself. He translated his vague and misty ideas into plain English, with the hope of shocking both Molther and his followers by their nature, but in vain. Wesley's account of the interview is amusing. "I weighed all his words," he says, "with the utmost care, desiring him to explain what I did not understand. I asked him again and again, 'Do I not mistake what you say? Is this your meaning or is it not?' So that I think if God has given me any measure of understanding I could not mistake him much." At the close of the interview Wesley wrote down what had passed in the plainest words, but the whole process was like trying to persuade a ghost to become solid flesh and blood.

Wesley preached to the members every night for a week, but his hearers were in a mood in which reason has no office and controversy only hardens. He was told bluntly that he was "preaching up the works of the law, which, as believers, they were no more bound to obey than the subjects of England were bound to obey the laws of France. One of them said, when publicly expounding Scripture, that as many went to hell by praying as by thieving. Another said, 'You have lost your first joy; therefore you pray; that is the Devil. You read the Bible; that is the Devil. You communicate; that is the Devil.'"

Finally, Wesley brought the matter to an issue. The spurious treatise of Dionysius the Areopagite was a favourite book amongst the Moravians. It is full—as Wesley himself says—of "super-essential darkness," a mere weltering chaos of mystic nonsense. Wesley took it to the Society on the night of July 16, 1740, and read some deadly extracts from it. Here is the passage from it on which he challenged the little gathering:—

> The Scriptures are good; prayer is good; communicating is good; relieving our neighbours is good; but to one who is not born of God, none of these is good, but all very evil. For him to read the Scriptures, or to pray, or to communicate, or to do any outward work, is deadly poison. First let him be born of God. Till then let him not do any of these things. For if he does, he destroys himself.
>
> 'After reading this twice or thrice over, as distinctly as I could,' he says, 'I asked, "My brethren, is this right, or is it wrong?" Mr. Bell answered immediately:
>
> 'It is right; it is all right. It is the truth. To this we must all come, or we never can come to Christ.'
>
> 'Mr. Bray said, "I believe our brother Bell did not hear what you read, or did not rightly understand."
>
> 'But Mr. Bell replied short, "Yes, I heard every word, and I understand it well. I say, it is the truth; it is the very truth; it is the inward truth."'

Matters, upon this, came quickly to a crisis, for this was a doctrine which both shocked Wesley's conscience and affronted his common-sense. Wesley himself was no longer allowed to preach in Fetter Lane. "This place," he was told, "is taken for the Germans." He had already obtained possession of the Foundry—a large, disused workshop in Moorfields—and had begun to hold services there. If driven from Fetter Lane, he had thus a new centre. On Sunday night, July 20, Wesley went to the Love-feast in Fetter Lane, and read a short paper in which he recited the reasons and the history of the dispute. The paper ended:—

> "You have often affirmed that to search the Scriptures, to pray, or to communicate, before we have this faith, is to seek salvation by works: and that till these works are laid aside, no man can receive faith.

"I believe these assertions to be flatly contrary to the Word of God. I have warned you hereof again and again, and besought you to turn back to the 'law and the testimony.' I have borne with you long, hoping you would turn. But as I find you more and more confirmed in the error of your ways, nothing now remains—but that I should give you up to God. You that are of the same judgment, follow me."[1]

"I then," says Wesley, "without saying anything more, withdrew, as did eighteen or nineteen of the society."

According to the Moravians themselves, the dramatic effect of Wesley's departure from the building was spoilt by a petty but ingenious trick. As the persons present came into the room they placed their hats all together on the ground in one corner; but Wesley's hat had been—by design—carried off. When he had finished his paper and called upon all who agreed with him to follow him, he walked across the room, but could not discover his hat! The pause, the search which followed, quite effaced the impressiveness of his departure, and, as Southey puts it, "the wily Molther and his followers had time to arrest many who would have been carried away in his wake."

Zinzendorf sent another and wiser representative, Spangenberg, to confer with Wesley, and act as mediator between the divided parties. Spangenberg decided that Molther and his followers were wrong, and had treated Wesley ill; but this did not end the controversy. Peter Böhler, in turn, was sent to London to put matters right. He was a man to be trusted, and Wesley's personal debt to him, it was calculated, would outweigh all other considerations. And much of the charm of Böhler and of his influence over Wesley still survived. After an interview with him Wesley wrote, "I marvel how I refrain from joining these men. I scarce ever see any of them but my heart burns within me. I long to be with them, and yet I am kept from them."

But where practical morality was, no matter how remotely, concerned Wesley was inexorable, and at bottom Moravian doctrine, as Molther had poisoned it, and as it was now fermenting amongst Wesley's societies,

[1] Journal, June 20, 1740.

was a quarrel with morality. Wesley wrote to his brother Samuel, whose obstinate good sense, in spite of wide theological differences, weighed heavily with his younger brother:—

"As yet I dare in no wise join with the Moravians; because their general scheme is mystical, not Scriptural, refined in every point above what is written, immeasurably beyond the plain Gospel; because there is darkness and closeness in all their behaviour, and guile in almost all their words; because they not only do not practise, but utterly despise and decry self-denial and the daily cross. For these reasons chiefly I will rather, God being my Helper, stand quite alone than join with them."

Finally Zinzendorf himself came to England. The question whether Moravianism was to take root on English soil was at issue, and Zinzendorf was anxious. Wesley and he held a memorable conversation — not under any roof, but in Gray's Inn Walk—at that time a little patch of faded verdure set amid the dust and roar of London streets.

They walked to and fro—a strange pair, the stately German noble and the prim little Anglican divine. The conversation was in Latin, and is recorded in Latin in Wesley's Journal. "Why," began Zinzendorf, "have you changed your religion?" Wesley, of course, denied the charge. The conversation wandered through the whole realm of theology; but the difference betwixt the two men was fundamental:—

"'You have affirmed,' said Zinzendorf, 'in your epistle, that they who are true Christians are not miserable sinners; and this is most false: for the best of men are most miserable sinners, even till death. They who teach otherwise are either absolute impostors, or they are under a diabolical delusion.' 'What is Christian perfection?' he demanded again. 'It is imputed—not inherent. We are never perfect in ourselves.' Then he went on: 'We reject all self-denial; we trample on it. In faith we do whatever we desire, and nothing more. We laugh at all mortification; no purification precedes perfect love.'"[1]

These were, in Wesley's ears, words rash, extravagant, perilous! The conversation left the breach as wide as

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 220.

ever, and later Wesley in a powerful letter formulates and puts on record the fundamental differences which parted Methodism and Moravianism, and must always keep them asunder. Zinzendorf responded by publishing an advertisement in the newspapers declaring that he and his people had no connection with John and Charles Wesley. Thus came to an end a goodlier fellowship than that of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

Many curious and even absurd explanations of this breach are offered by the historians and critics of Methodism. Southey blames Wesley's ambition for the controversy. "John Wesley," he says, "could never have been more than a member of the Moravian Church; the first place was occupied, and he was not born to hold a secondary place." Coleridge says the true reason of the dispute is to be found in the diversity of the German and English genius. Elsewhere he says that Zinzendorf was a metaphysician without logic, and Wesley a logician without metaphysics: hence their hopeless quarrel. Later still—and with true Coleridgean inconsistency—he finds the blackest wickedness in Wesley's spirit throughout the whole transaction, and falls foul of his friend Southey for dealing with Wesley too lightly:—

"Robert Southey (he says) is an historian worth his weight in diamonds, and were he (which heaven forfend) as fat as myself, and the diamonds all as big as bird's eggs, I should still repeat the appraisal. . . . But here, I am vexed with him for not employing stronger and more impassioned words of reprobation, and moral recoil in this black blotch of Wesley's heart and character."

But the cause of the dispute lies deeper than any mere difference between English and German genius, or in the mental characteristics of Zinzendorf and of Wesley. Molther's teaching, in fact, was an aberration from Moravian doctrine; it declared, in the last analysis, that religion had nothing to do with morality. Surely a strange and dreadful doctrine!

Half-truths are often whole heresies; and Molther was led astray because he saw truth only in fragments, or in false perspective. Christianity, in a sense, changes

the ethical order. It gives to obedience a new place, and equips it with new motives. A forgiven soul obeys because it is forgiven, and under the motives which forgiveness creates. But Molther was so eager to affirm that we do not purchase our forgiveness by our obedience, that he forgot to assert that we obey, and must obey, under the inspiration of forgiveness.

The mischief of Molther's doctrine was immediate and long-enduring. It poisoned the teaching of not a few of Wesley's own helpers. It taught them what Wesley calls "a luscious style of preaching." "They feed their people," he says, "with sweetmeats." They talked much of the promises and little of the commands. "What are vulgarly called 'Gospel sermons,'" he says again, "has now become a mere cant word; I wish none of our society would use it. Let but a pert, self-sufficient animal, that has neither sense or grace," he cries with angry energy, "bawl out something about Christ or His blood, or justification by faith, and his hearers cry out, 'What a fine Gospel sermon.' Surely the Methodists have not so learned Christ."

The taint of Antinomianism in such teaching produced —as was inevitable—some dreadful forms of immorality, of which the notorious case of Wheatley, one of Wesley's helpers, who corrupted a whole town, is an example. We have only to remember the story of the Brethren and Sisters of the Free Spirit in the fourteenth century, of the Munster Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, and of the New Lights in England in Cromwell's later days, to understand the peril which overhung Wesley's work at this stage.

Wesley's Journal gives many examples of the deadly mischief wrought amongst his converts. Thus, in March 1746, at Birmingham, he tells how one "came to me, and looking over his shoulder, said, 'Don't think I want to be in your Society; but if you are free to speak to me, you may.'" After some conversation Wesley asked: "Do you believe you have nothing to do with the law of God!"

"'I have not,' was the answer. 'I am not under the law; I live by faith.' 'Have you, as living by faith, a right to everything in the world?' 'I have: all is mine, since Christ is mine.' 'May you, then, take anything you will, anywhere, suppose, out of a shop, without the consent or knowledge of the owner?' 'I

may, if I want it; for it is mine; only I will not give offence.' 'Have you also a right to all the women in the world?' 'Yes, if they consent.' 'And is that not a sin?' 'Yes, to him that thinks it is a sin; but not to those whose hearts are free.' 'The same thing,' comments Wesley, 'that wretch, Roger Ball, affirmed in Dublin. Surely these are first-born children of Satan.'"

Seven years later Wesley records a conversation he had, again at Birmingham, with a woman who had fallen under Moravian influence:—

"'I never pray,' she said, 'for what can I pray for? I have all.' I asked, 'Do you not pray for sinners?' She said, 'No; I know no sinners but one. I know but two in the world: God is one and the devil is the other.' I asked, 'Did not Adam sin of old; and do not adulterers and murderers sin now?' She replied, 'No, Adam never sinned; and no man sins now; it is only the devil.' 'And will no man ever be damned?' 'No man ever will.' 'Nor the devil?' 'I am not so sure; but I believe not.' 'Do you receive the Sacrament?' 'No, I do not want it.' 'Is the word of God your rule?' 'Yes; the word made flesh, but not the letter. I am in the spirit.'"

"Upon inquiry," adds Wesley, "I found these wild enthusiasts were six in all—four men and two women. They had first run into the height of Antinomianism, and then were given up to the spirit of pride and blasphemy."

Two years later still—so long-enduring are the forces of evil—in 1755—Wesley records in his Journal:—

"On Friday, April 4, to Birmingham, a barren, dry, uncomfortable place. Most of the seed which had been sown for so many years the 'wild boars' have rooted up; the fierce, unclean, brutish, blasphemous Antinomians have utterly destroyed it. And the mystic foxes have taken true pains to spoil what remained with their new Gospel."

All this shows not only how deadly, but how obstinate, was the mischief wrought by the Moravian lapse into Antinomianism.

Fletcher wrote his famous "Checks" to arrest the poisonous taint which was creeping into the very blood of the societies. These "Checks" are matchless in force of logic and in grace of literary style; but who now reads them? They are forgotten! But this is only because the

evil which made them necessary has practically ceased to exist. The blood of Christendom has been purged of the Antinomian strain, and the universal Christian conscience has arrayed itself on Wesley's side. Wesley, indeed, did more than save his own movement from ruin and defeat by the resolute stand he took at this stage of his work. He helped, for all the Churches, and for all time, to avert a peril which threatened Christian morality itself. And how different might have been the religious history of England if the great revival of the eighteenth century had been captured by the mystics; if Zinzendorf and not Wesley had determined its theology and stamped himself upon its character!

# CHAPTER III

## THE CONTROVERSY WITH WHITEFIELD

WHITEFIELD, as we have seen, was a convinced and exultant Calvinist. He believed in God's love passionately, but he found it possible to believe that this love, high beyond all dreams, deep beyond all sounding, had yet a mysterious and tragical narrowness. It was certainly narrower than the human race, since it left whole sections of that race in the outer darkness of a reprobation lit with no gleams of mercy. The doctrine that God did *not* love the race, and that Christ had *not* died for all men was, even in Whitefield's eyes, "the children's bread," something precious and nourishing. To cast it away, to leave it unproclaimed, was to rob Christ's household.

To Wesley, on the other hand, that doctrine was a denial of the whole Gospel. It left him without a message. There was, at this point, betwixt the leaders of the great revival a breach of doctrinal belief deep and impassable. Wesley's great rule in all theological differences, however, was to "Think and let think." He had no doctrinal tests for his societies, and he certainly would not separate from a great and loyal comrade like Whitefield, who agreed with him in so many essential beliefs, because, at one point of metaphysical divinity, their theologies differed.

Yet the breach in doctrine betwixt the two men was something more than a question in metaphysics. It was fundamental. It pierced to the very heart of their creed. It carried with it far-reaching moral issues. It must, sooner or later, cause a division in their work. The mere impulse of the controversialist, the natural desire to win converts and to refute opponents, made either silence or peace as a permanent condition impossible.

The rupture came from Whitefield's side. He was no logician. His beliefs and his feelings were kept in separate

compartments; his creed was a mosaic of unrelated fragments. Yet there are signs that in his conscience there was an unacknowledged disquiet with his own theology. He was conscious, too, of Wesley's greater intellectual strength and wider range of scholarship; and the knowledge that the man who was his natural leader, at whose feet he had sat for years, differed so profoundly from him at a point so serious, was to Whitefield a gnawing, if unconfessed, disquiet. He could not leave the subject betwixt them alone. He writes to Wesley begging him "for once to hearken to a child who is willing to wash your feet":—

"The doctrine of election, and the final perseverance of those who are in Christ, I am ten thousand times more convinced of —if possible—than when I saw you last. You think otherwise. Why, then, should we dispute when there is no probability of convincing?"[1]

But Whitefield himself could not rest. He must try to convince Wesley. He writes to him from America:—

"The more I examine the writings of the most experienced men and the experiences of the most established Christians the more I differ from . . . your denying the doctrines of election and the final perseverance of the saints. I dread coming to England unless you are resolved to oppose these truths with less warmth than when I was there last. I dread your coming over to America, because the work of God is carried on here and that in a most glorious manner by doctrines quite opposite to those you hold. God direct me what to do. Perhaps I may never see you again till we meet in judgment; then, if not before, you will know that sovereign, distinguishing, irresistible grace brought you to heaven."

There is something almost amusing in the brief, composed, matter-of-fact reply Wesley makes to Whitefield's agitated appeals. He tries to cool his alarms with a few drops of patient ink:—

"The case is quite plain. There are bigots both for predestination and against it. God is sending a message to those on either side, but neither will receive it unless from one who is of their own opinion. Therefore for a time you are suffered to be

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 226.

of one opinion, and I of another. But when His time is come, God will do what men cannot—namely, make us both of one mind."[1]

Wesley's large-mindedness at this point was, on his part, both genuine and habitual. He acted upon it as a steadfast policy. He was perfectly willing to give to his own followers the largest liberty of disagreeing with himself on abstract points, so that in the realm of practical conduct they agreed.

Smaller controversialists meanwhile were busy, and their zeal was quite unflavoured by either prudence or charity. A leading member of the Society in London, named Acourt, insisted on turning the Society into a debating class on the subject of predestination, until Charles Wesley, in the interest of quiet, gave orders that he should no longer be admitted. John Wesley was present, as it happened, when this too zealous theologian next presented himself, and demanded whether he was to be expelled because he differed from them only in opinion. He was asked, "What opinion?" and replied, "That of election. I hold that a certain number are elected from eternity, and these must and shall be saved, and the rest of mankind must and shall be damned." And he affirmed that many of the Society held the same; upon which Wesley observed that he never asked whether they did or not; "only let them not trouble others by disputing about it." Acourt replied, "Nay, but I will dispute about it." "Why, then," said Wesley, "would you come among us, whom you know are of another mind?" "Because you are all wrong and I am resolved to set you all right." "I fear," said Wesley, "your coming with this view would neither profit you nor us." "Then," rejoined Acourt, "I will go and tell all the world that you and your brother are false prophets."

Whitefield, on his part, continued to exhort Wesley to a silence, in his public discourses, on the subject about which they disagreed, which he did not himself observe. "For Christ's sake," he writes, "if possible never speak against election in your sermons. No one can say that I ever mentioned it in public discourse, whatever my private sentiments may be." And yet, at the same time, White-

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 227.

field records in his journal his resolve "to henceforth speak more boldly and explicitly as I ought to speak on these subjects." His memory, it is clear, betrayed him when writing to Wesley!

Meanwhile the compulsion of events was too strong for both men. Wesley was sharply accused by a correspondent of "not preaching the Gospel"—the "Gospel" being, according to this particular theologian, the doctrine of election and nothing else. The letter somehow moved even Wesley's composed mind; and, as was his custom in matters of difficulty, he "sought counsel of God by casting lots." This yielded the message, "Preach and print." He accordingly, in 1739, preached and printed the immortal sermon on Free Grace, the third discourse he ever published.

That sermon is, amongst other things, a revelation of Wesley's real qualities as a preacher. His other printed sermons are, in the main, so many theological dry bones; dry bones upon which the prophet's breath had ceased to blow. They are the petrified remains of sermons. They lack living tissue; there is in them no throb of passion, no breath of life. But in this sermon we have Wesley as a living preacher. His sentences burn with fire. There is a pulse of energy in the very syllables. Logic and rhetoric have opposite and, in many respects, incompatible qualities. Logic borrows from ice its crystalline clearness and its coldness. Rhetoric takes from fire its heat and glow. But in this sermon Wesley somehow gives his logic the rush and fire of eloquence, or rather he teaches the fiery haste of his rhetoric to steal from logic its ordered and close-linked strength. Lord Liverpool, on whose impassive figure Pitt and Fox, Burke and Sheridan, had expended all their matchless eloquence in vain, declared that parts of Wesley's sermon on "Free Grace" were unsurpassed either in ancient or modern oratory. Here is an example of its fire:—

"It [the doctrine of reprobation] represents the most holy God as worse than the devil, as both more false, more cruel and more unjust. More false because the devil, liar as he is, has never said 'He willeth all men to be saved.' More unjust because the devil, if he would, cannot be guilty of such injustice as you ascribe

to God when you say that God condemned millions of souls to everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, for continuing in sin which for want of that grace which He will not give them they cannot avoid. And more cruel because that unhappy spirit seeketh rest and findeth none, so that his own restless misery is a kind of temptation to him to tempt others. But God resteth in His high and holy place, so that to suppose Him of His own mere motion, of His pure will and pleasure, happy as He is, to doom His creatures whether they will or no to endless misery, is to impute such cruelty to Him as we cannot impute even to the great enemy of God and man. It is to represent the most High God (he that hath ears to hear let him hear) as more cruel, false, and unjust than the devil. Here I fix my foot. You represent God as worse than the devil.

"But you say 'you will prove it by Scripture.' Hold! What! Will you prove by Scripture that God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it can never prove this; whatever its true meaning be, this cannot be its true meaning. Do you ask, 'What is its true meaning then?' If I say I know not you have gained nothing; for there are many Scriptures the true sense whereof neither you nor I shall know till death is swallowed up in victory. But this I know, better it were to say it had no sense at all than to say that it had such a sense as this. It cannot mean, whatever it mean besides, that the God of truth is a liar. Let it mean what it will, it cannot mean that the Judge of all the earth is unjust."

Whitefield, by this time, had grown more sharply admonitory. "Give me leave," he says, "with all humility to exhort you not to be strenuous in opposing the doctrines of election and final perseverance, when by your own confession you have not the witness of the Spirit within yourself, and consequently are not a proper judge. I am assured God has now for some years given me this living witness in my soul."[1]

Whitefield finds in the very fact that Wesley does not fill his letters with arguments about election, a darkly suspicious circumstance. "I wish," he writes, "I knew your principles fully. Did you write oftener and more frankly, it might have a better effect than silence and reserve."

A controversialist in distress for arguments is apt to

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 228.

take refuge in moral admonitions addressed to his opponent, as to the quality of his motives and conduct; and Whitefield about this time discovers that Wesley's bad theology has a root in the mournfully defective moral condition of Wesley himself. "My dear brother," he writes, "take heed. Beware of a false peace. . . . Remember you are but a babe in Christ, if so much. Be humble. Talk little. Think and pray much. . . . If you must dispute, stay till you are a master of the subject."

"Meanwhile, you will not own election," he complains again, "because you cannot own it without believing the doctrine of reprobation. What then," he asks indignantly, "is there in reprobation so horrid?" Southey, who as a general rule sides with Whitefield against Wesley, here is compelled to answer Whitefield's question:—

"'The doctrine,' he says, 'implies that an Almighty and Allwise Creator has called into existence the greater part of the human race to the end that, after a short, sinful, and miserable life, they should pass into an eternity of inconceivable torments, it being the pleasure of their Creator that they should not be able to obey His commands, and yet incur the penalty of everlasting damnation for disobedience.'" [1]

Events were now moving fast. A discord in belief so acute was certain to register itself in outward form. Wesley strove manfully, first, to escape debate, or if this was not possible, to carry it on in a generous temper; but Whitefield, for a moment, at least, fell to lower levels. He printed and privately circulated a bitter letter against Wesley, in which he ridiculed Wesley's habit of casting lots to settle difficult questions, and gave instances of a very private and confidential kind. The letter was printed by some of Whitefield's adherents, and copies distributed at the door of the Foundry. A copy was handed to Wesley. It was obviously a private letter. Wesley held it up, saying, "I will do just what I believe Mr. Whitefield would were he here himself," and he tore it to pieces; and every person in the congregation followed his example!

But Wesley and Whitefield, of course, had followers more vehement—more jealous for victory, and less careful for

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 230.

peace—than themselves. At Kingswood, John Cennick, one of Wesley's earliest converts, was employed as a teacher, and was greatly trusted by him. He was a Calvinist of an almost more aggressive type than Whitefield himself, and the Arminianism of the two Wesleys kindled in him a mood of brooding and angry mistrust. He wrote to Whitefield, then in America, calling upon him to hasten to England.

"'I sit,' he said, 'solitary, like Eli, waiting what will become of the ark. . . . How gloriously the Gospel seemed once to flourish in Kingswood! I spake of the everlasting love of Christ with sweet power. Yet, now brother Charles is suffered to open his mouth against this truth, while the frightened sheep gaze in reply. . . . With universal redemption brother Charles pleases the world; brother John follows him in everything. I believe no atheist can more preach against predestination than they. . . . Fly, dear brother! I am in the midst of the plague. If God gives thee leave, make haste.'"

Humour has a wholesome office even in theology, and a lively sense of it would have saved the Church from many disputes and not a few heresies. An atheist preaching against predestination is a sufficiently non-humorous conception; and when John Cennick saw in "brother Charles" nothing but this dreadful apparition, it is a sign that he had temporarily lost all salt of humour.

The letter fell into Wesley's hands. He had the instinct of a born leader of men for discipline. This was not a question of liberty, but of loyalty. Could he see his teaching attacked by one of his own teachers, and under the roof of his own school? Charles Wesley put the case with irresistible force to Cennick himself:—

"You came to Kingswood upon my brother's sending for you. You served under him in the Gospel as a son. I need not to say how well he loved you. You used the authority he gave you to overthrow his doctrine. You everywhere contradicted it (whether true or false, is not the question). But you ought first to have fairly told him, 'I preach contrary to you. Are you willing, notwithstanding, that I should continue in your house, gainsaying you? If you are not, I have no place in these regions. You have a right to this open dealing. I now give you fair warning.

Shall I stay here opposing you, or shall I depart?' My brother, have you dealt thus honestly and openly with him? No. But you have stolen away the people's heart from him. And when some of them basely treated their best friend, God only excepted, how patiently did you take it! When did you ever vindicate us as we have you! Why did you not plainly tell them, you are eternally indebted to these men?"[1]

Cennick had by this time formed a separate society; and Wesley, who always believed in straightforward measures, had a conference with the group of revolters. "Who told you," he asked them, "that what we preach is false doctrine?"

"I did say this," replied Cennick, "and I say it still. However, we are willing to join with you; but we will also meet apart from you."

"You should have told me this before," said Wesley, "and not have supplanted me in my own house . . . by private accusations separating very friends."

Cennick denied that he had privately accused Wesley. "Judge," replied Wesley to the meeting; and he produced Cennick's letter to Whitefield.

The gathering separated to meet again in a week. But when they met, Wesley offered them not arguments—it was no time for debate—but authority. He quietly stood up and read a brief paper:—

"By many witnesses it appears that several members of the Band Society in Kingswood have made it their common practice to scoff at the preaching of Mr. John and Charles Wesley; that they have censured and spoken evil of them behind their backs, at the very time they professed love and esteem to their faces; that they have studiously endeavoured to prejudice other members of that society against them, and in order, thereto, have belied and slandered them in divers instances; therefore, not for their opinions, nor for any of them (whether they be right or wrong), but for the causes above mentioned, viz., for their scoffing at the word and ministers of God, for their tale-bearing, back-biting, and evil-speaking, for their dissembling, lying, and slandering, I, John Wesley, by the consent and approbation of the Band Society in Kingswood, do declare the persons above mentioned to be no longer members thereof. Neither will they be so accounted until

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 236.

they shall openly confess their fault, and thereby do what in them lies to remove the scandal they have given."[1]

One of Cennick's followers said:—

"'It is our holding election which is the true cause of your separating from us.' 'You know in your own conscience it is not,' replied Wesley. 'There are several Predestinarians in our societies, both in London and Bristol, nor did I ever yet put one out of either because he held that opinion.' 'Well,' said the objector, 'we will break up our society, on condition you will receive and employ Mr. Cennick as you did before.' 'My brother has wronged me much,' replied Wesley, 'but he doth not say, "I repent."' 'Unless in not speaking in your defence, I do not know that I wronged you at all,' said Cennick. 'Nothing then remains, it seems,' said Wesley, 'but for each to choose which society he pleases.'"

Whitefield landed from America shortly afterwards. He was burdened with financial difficulties created by his orphan house in Georgia, and he was suffering from a temporary loss of popularity. His mood was bitter. He told Wesley they preached two different Gospels; therefore he would not join him, but would publicly preach against him, if ever he preached at all again. If he had ever promised not to do this, it was "due to human weakness," and he was now of a more heroic temper.

Correspondence betwixt the two friends grew bitter, and the dispute wandered into sad realms—the number of candles burned at Bristol, the quality of the furniture in Wesley's bedroom. "And do you grudge me this?" asked Wesley—"a garret in which a bed is placed. Is this the voice of my brother, my son, Whitefield?"

Whitefield told Wesley in reproachful accents, "infidels of all kinds are on your side of the question. Deists, Arians, Socinians arraign God's sovereignty and stand up for universal redemption." It needs no particular degree of scholarship to know that "Deists, Arians, and Socinians" believe in no redemption at all; that all are philosophical necessitarians. But scholarship was not Whitefield's forte.

Perhaps neither party in this great debate looked at

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 237.

the strong point in his opponent's position. Here is the fact which makes the tragedy of the universe, and seems to impeach either the goodness or the power of God: some of His creatures are in open quarrel with His laws. They love what He hates, and hate what He loves; and being in quarrel with His universe, they must perish. Now, any system of theology is bound to supply some explanation of this grim and dreadful fact.

Coleridge supplies a characteristically vague answer: an answer which is not an explanation of the difficulty, but a flight from it:—

"In the question of Election relatively to the Divine Elector, we have only to challenge the judicial faculty as incompetent to try the cause; and this we prove at once, by showing the incapability of the human understanding to present the idea to itself as it really is, and the consequent necessity it is under of substituting anthropomorphic conception, determined by accident of place and time (*pre*, *post*, *futurum*—before, after, to come) as feeble analogies and approximations. Having thus disqualified both the faculty that is to judge, and the premises that are to be judged of, the conclusion perishes *per abortem*."[1]

This, of course, is not a solution of the problem, but an announcement that it is insoluble. Human reason, Coleridge says, in effect, is incompetent to try this case. It has no office in a realm so high! What is this but a proclamation of the bankruptcy of reason?

Whitefield's Calvinism had, in one sense, a noble root. It sprang, in part, at least, from humility. He had so overwhelming a consciousness of personal ill-desert, that it seemed incredible that any act or condition of his own could be an element in his acceptance with God. But Whitefield was driven into naked Calvinism by one dreadful, and what seemed flawless, bit of logic. To say that God willed to save a man who, visibly, was not saved, meant that God had suffered moral defeat in His own world! It was to deny His omnipotence. "How could all be universally redeemed," he asked, "if all are not universally saved?" Whitefield preferred to say God *would* not save, rather than that He *could* not.

[1] Southey, vol. i. p. 227.

Calvin himself calls this doctrine "*tremendum, horrendum, incomprehensibile: et verissimum. . . .*" And it was "verissimum" because to deny it seemed the denial of God's omnipotence.

But Wesley, with nobler logic, refused to save God's omnipotence at the cost of His moral character. It were better to deny His omnipotence than His goodness! Whitefield's doctrine could only be true on the theory that right and wrong are not changeless, universal, and eternal, running through all the ranks and orders of the universe up to God Himself, of whose character they are the transcript. But is it thinkable that a lie, if only God tells it, is as sacred as truth; that what would be hateful and cruel, if found in human conduct, becomes admirable and good if it is only God's act! That is to unsettle all morality! As Miss Wedgwood puts it:—

"The human being who came nearest to the God of the Calvinists would be a father who chose out certain of his children to be sent away from his sight, at their birth, into some den of wickedness, to be brought up there; and who afterwards took an active share in bringing them to the gallows. And yet men who would have died any number of deaths themselves to save one soul from hell have regarded the decree by which the greater portion of the human race was devoted to hell before the world began not merely with reverent awe, but with delight." [1]

But did Wesley's theology save God's character at the expense of His omnipotence? Assuredly not! The key to the problem lies in the very nature of moral goodness itself. Moral freedom is the essential condition of moral character. Goodness means the choice of obedience when disobedience is possible. And when God created moral character He took the tremendous and inevitable risks of that great act. In the realm of moral character omnipotence has no office; and God has set us in that high kingdom. But this represents not the defeat of God's omnipotence, but only its self-imposed limitations.

"Thought, conscience, will—to make them all thine own
He rent a pillar from th' eternal throne.

[1] Wedgwood, p. 230.

Made in His image, thou must nobly dare
The thorny crown of sovereignty to wear.
Think not too meanly of thy low estate;
Thou hast a choice; to choose is to create."

The denial of this truth robs all moral terms of their significance, and we must reconstruct human language. If the human soul is only a machine which must obey the impulse towards lust or purity, towards love or cruelty, which its Maker has given it, what use is there for the phraseology of either praise or blame? And how does it come to pass, it may be asked, that a machine has come to conceive a thought of goodness which is not that of a machine?

We do not save the moral character of God by denying the free will of man; we only transfer the shame and guilt of human sin to God Himself. He is its author! He planned it; He ordained it. He *meant* the harlot as well as the saint; the betrayer as well as the martyr; Judas as well as John, and Domitian as well as Paul. And He then pursues His own creatures with wrath through all the chambers of His universe, and all the ages of His eternity, for being what He made them. We may vary Calvin's dreadful epithets. This doctrine is "*tremendum, horrendum, incomprehensibile, et* FALSISSIMUM."

It is certain that in human society we must act on the theory that men are responsible for their acts, and be justly punished or rewarded for them. It is certain that God, too, acts on that theory; and if it is not true, then not only human society, but the whole moral universe itself, is built on a lie. If goodness is compelled and involuntary, it ceases to be goodness; and compelled and involuntary sin the human conscience, with its utmost authority, declares to be no sin. The theory that denies this is in conflict with the surest and deepest judgment of the human soul. No! God has set up in the human soul the august faculty of a free moral will; a will that has power to say "yes" or "no" to Himself. And the key to the glory as well as the tragedy of the universe lies there.

The general conscience of the race, we have said, has

arrayed itself finally on the side of Wesley as against the Moravian reading of religion. And both the reason and the conscience of mankind have declared themselves on the side of Wesley as against Whitefield's perverse and dreadful theology.

# CHAPTER IV

## THE ONFALL OF THE BISHOPS

In a famous passage Macaulay discusses the use the Roman Catholic Church would have made of Wesley. Rome certainly knows the value of enthusiasm, and has the art of using enthusiasts. What is the secret of the strange arrest which fell upon the Reformation of the sixteenth century, so that while Northern Europe became Protestant, Southern Europe remained, and remains, Roman Catholic? The explanation, of course, is found chiefly in the emergence of the great Order of the Society of Jesus. Ignatius Loyola is the champion Rome evolved against Luther. He was an enthusiast of the most fanatical type, and the Roman Church, instead of quarrelling with him, found a use for him; permitted him to create an Order, and turned him, and it, into the most formidable of weapons against its enemies. "At Rome," says Macaulay, "the Countess of Huntingdon would have been given a place in the calendar as St. Selina; Joanna Southcott would have founded an order of barefooted Carmelites; Mrs. Fry would have been the first superior of the Blessed Order of Sisters of the Gaols. Ignatius Loyola at Oxford would have headed a secession; John Wesley at Rome would have become the first General of a new Society devoted to the interests and honour of the Church."

This is one of those easy and picturesque generalisations which are the charm—and the peril—of Macaulay's historical writings. Loyola was a Spaniard, a fanatic; a soldier with an intellect as narrow and as hard as his own sword. Wesley was an Englishman, a scholar, a logician, a saint. The two men under no conditions could have exchanged parts. The Church of Rome, moreover, is a spiritual despotism. In the Order of Jesus, its highest expression, slavery is crystallised into a system. The Church and the Order correspond to each other; for

despotism and slavery are eternal correlatives. But the Anglican Church, with all its faults, represents spiritual freedom. It failed to find a place for Wesley, and that failure is the scandal and tragedy of its history. It justifies the description of Anglicanism as "the Church of missed opportunities." But under no conditions could it have produced an Ignatius Loyola, or found a use for one.

But how did it happen that the Anglican Church could not find a use for Wesley and his great comrades? These men were more than its children; they were God's great and special gifts to it. They had an unquestioning faith in its doctrines, and were fanatically zealous for its ritual and its services. Whitefield, if his sermons are judged by their immediate effects, was perhaps the greatest preacher the English race has ever produced. John Wesley had unsurpassed gifts of leadership. Charles Wesley is one of the immortal hymn-writers of the Christian religion. What Church might not have welcomed such men as divine gifts! These men, too, brought to the religion of the eighteenth century exactly what it wanted; the note of passion, the contagious energy of intense enthusiasm. And they were specially fitted to render the one service the social and religious life of that day needed—the service of bridging the fast widening chasm betwixt the Church and the common people. On one side they were scholars and gentlemen; on the other they were themselves trained in poverty, and could talk the language of the common people. Wesley could preach from the pulpit of St. Mary's, at Oxford to the Heads of colleges, to Fellows and undergraduates and proctors, and hold them breathless. But he could preach, too, in Gwennap Pit, or on the hill-side of Kingswood, to 10,000 rough miners and watch the tears running down well-nigh as many faces.

Why did the Anglican Church of that day shut its doors against men like these, and turn them, in spite of themselves, into "schismatics"? They were its own children, baptized at its font, fed at its table, taught in its universities. It evolved these men, educated them, ordained them, and then—cast them out!

Newman's pathetic cry when he finally broke with the Anglican Church is still remembered. "Oh my Mother! whence is this unto thee, that thou hast good things poured

upon thee and canst not keep them, and bearest children yet darest not own them? . . . How is it that whatever is generous in purpose, and tender or deep in devotion, thy flower and thy promise, falls from thy bosom and finds no hope within thine arms?" With better title than even Newman Wesley might have written those words.

The story of the slow, reluctant, compelled steps by which Wesley formally separated—or prepared his followers for separation—from the Anglican Church will be told later. But there is already visible, at this early stage of its history, a fatal inability on the part of the Anglican Church to understand the new movement; a hopeless breach of sympathy with it; a mood of angry suspicion about it, which swiftly hardened into dislike, and even grew fierce with hate. "We cannot but regard you," wrote one of the Anglican leaders of that day, "as our most dangerous enemies." And yet the Church of that day had many enemies—gigantic national vices, a triumphant infidelity, a spiritual indifference that lay like an Antarctic frost on a whole people.

The Fellows of Magdalen required candidates for university prizes to sign a paper renouncing "the practice and principles of the people called Methodists." Bishops levelled their charges at the unfortunate Methodists. The clergy not seldom inspired, and sometimes even publicly led, the mobs against them. They were forbidden to preach under Church roofs, and then treated as criminal, because they preached under the open sky. "They thrust us into the mud," says Wesley, "and then complained because we were dirty."

Wesley and his comrades, on their part, had at first an almost passionate eagerness of obedience. It was only when ecclesiastical obedience meant disobedience to some spiritual obligation—when the lower duty was in conflict with the higher—that a breach occurred. There is an amusing account of an interview betwixt Gibson, Bishop of London, and the two Wesleys. Gibson, as we have already said, was a fair type of the Hanoverian divines of that day; a scholar, a politician—he was familiarly known as the "Pope" of Walpole, the Prime Minister—a man who cared much for secular peace and

little for spiritual ideals. Each of the brothers had his special difficulty to submit to the Bishop. John Wesley, the graver spirit of the two, his mind full of the new spiritual movement beginning to stir, asked his bishop whether, if he preached a sermon to one of his societies, this turned it into a conventicle, and so made it illegal. Charles Wesley, always the High Churchman, began to argue for the rebaptizing of Dissenters. And his logic was resistless! If the High Church theory is true—if baptism carries with it such tremendous consequences, and if issues so vast depend on the right set of fingers being employed—ought not an unhappy Dissenter's salvation to be put beyond doubt by the process of rebaptizing him? "Sure and unsure," Charles Wesley told his bishop, "were not the same."

Gibson looked at the two brothers with alarm, and satisfied neither of them. An eighteenth-century bishop was required, no doubt, like modern bishops, to walk on a tight rope with much anxious balancing; but Gibson was only the Lord Melbourne of a century later in lawn sleeves and an apron. His ideal about everything is expressed by Melbourne's famous question: "Can't you let it alone?" These young men were enthusiasts; and "enthusiasm" was the one deadly and unforgivable offence of which the eighteenth-century divine could be guilty. The mere hint or whisper of it affected all the Anglican leaders of that day as a sudden rise in the thermometer might affect a company of architects who had just succeeded in raising a palace of ice. It was a secret omen of swift-coming and inevitable ruin!

The Church of England, moreover, is a bundle of theological compromises. In the variety of their contents, the Thirty-nine Articles resemble the sheet Peter saw in vision let down from heaven. Now enthusiasm is always fatal to compromise. So the Articles were, for the clergy of that day, either attenuated into metaphors or frozen into icicles. But Methodism offered them the startling apparition of these same Articles suddenly become alive, translated out of decorous abstractions into living conduct; visiting the gaols, preaching in the fields, talking the language of the common people. And the

leaders of the new movement, when bishops frowned on them, church doors were shut against them, and the symbols of Christ's death were refused to them, instead of betaking themselves out of the Church and turning Dissenters, insisted on stopping inside it, and even on trying to mend it! "You," cried the exasperated divines of that day, "are our most dangerous enemies."

The Anglican Church in the eighteenth century was, in brief, a sort of theological Sargasso Sea. On its weedy and tideless waters institutions and articles floated as wrecks float in those tepid latitudes. The movement originated by Wesley and his fellows resembled a Gulf Stream set suddenly flowing through the stagnant depths, a gale of bracing northern air suddenly blowing across the moveless atmosphere, much to the disturbance of all the weed-grown hulls floating peacefully there.

On the part of the Anglican Church there was no formal act of expulsion registered. But there was a wordless, a more than half unconscious, but a final rejection of the new spiritual movement and all it meant; a rejection which constitutes one of the most tragical chapters in the history of that Church. And that rejection, it is clear, was due to a fundamental discord of temper, the inevitable and eternal quarrel betwixt fire and ice.

Four bishops have won an evil fame for themselves by their dealings with Whitefield and the Wesleys. Gibson, Bishop of London, began by being politely tolerant of the new movement, and ended by throwing his whole weight into the scales against it. He published a notable tract against the Methodists, in which he laments through whole pages that the Methodists declined to emigrate from the Established Church. The Act of Toleration of 1689, exempted from certain penal statutes persons who dissented from the Church of England; and any person who desired to acquire the most rudimentary liberty of conscience and of act had to pay the price of declaring himself a Dissenter. But the Methodists refused to label themselves with that title. They crowded to the services of the Church. They thronged to the Communion table in such numbers that, as Gibson lamented almost

with tears, a clergyman had not time to dine before afternoon service! The Wesleys, he added indignantly, "have had the boldness to preach in the fields and other open places, and by public advertisements to invite the rabble to be their hearers"; and still, as this curious bishop complained, they refused to emigrate from the Church—a Church which certainly had no message for "the rabble," and no desire to be charged with one.

Gibson was particularly affronted with the place given in the working theology of these new religious teachers to the Holy Spirit. He, like many of his clergy, held the curious theory that the Divine Spirit acted everywhere in general, but nowhere in particular; while the deluded Methodists actually taught the incredible doctrine that the Holy Spirit worked in individual souls, and manifested His influence at particular moments. Whitefield answered the bishop very happily:—

"Does it not frequently happen, my Lord, that the comfort and happiness of our whole lives depend on one particular action? And where then is the absurdity of saying that the Holy Spirit may, even in the minutest circumstances, direct and rule our hearts? . . . Did I not, when ordained deacon, affirm 'that I was inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon me that office and ministration'? Did not my Lord of Gloucester, when he ordained me priest, say unto me, 'Receive thou the Holy Ghost now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands'? And is not this, my Lord, a reasonable evidence that I act by a divine commission? If this be not true, must not all those whom your Lordship ordains act only by a human commission?"[1]

One of Gibson's clergy, Church, Prebend of St. Paul's, had published a pamphlet in support of his diocesan, declaring that the Methodists were "rooting out the remains of piety and devotion in the weak and well-meaning." Wesley, who was always sensitive to any attack on the practical result of his work, fell upon the unfortunate prebend with the fury and impact of a thunderbolt. "The people," Church wrote, "went on in

[1] Wedgwood, p. 305.

a quiet and regular practice of their duty before you deluded them." Wesley replies:—

"Let us bring this question into as narrow a compass as possible. Let us go no further as to time than seven years past, as to place than London and the part adjoining, as to persons than you and me, Thomas Church preaching one doctrine, John Wesley the other Now then, let us consider with meekness and fear what have been the consequences of each doctrine. I beseech you to consider in the secret of your heart how many sinners you have converted to God. By their fruits we shall know them. By this test let them be tried. How many outwardly and habitually wicked men have you brought to uniform habits of outward holiness? 'Tis an awful thought. Can you instance in a hundred? In fifty? In twenty? In ten? If not, take heed unto yourself and to your doctrine. It cannot be that both are right before God. Consider now (I would not speak, but I dare not refrain) what have been the consequences of even my preaching the other doctrine? By the fruits shall we know those of whom I speak, even the cloud of witnesses who at this hour experience the doctrine I preach to be the power of God unto salvation. The habitual drunkard that was, is now temperate in all things. The whoremonger now flees fornication. He that stole steals no more, but works with his hands. He that has cursed or swore, perhaps at every sentence, has now learned to serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice unto Him with reverence. These are demonstrable facts. I can name the men, with their several places of abode."[1]

Wesley usually treated bishops with respect, but a later charge of Bishop Gibson, written in 1747, roused his indignation. He accused Wesley of teaching that favoured a low type of morality, and charged his clergy to warn mankind in general against the Methodists. Wesley replied in words which vibrate with a grave and noble indignation:—

"Here is an angel of the Church of Christ, one of the stars in God's right hand, calling together all the subordinate pastors, for whom he is to give an account to God, and directing them in the name of the Great Shepherd of the sheep, the First

[1] Wedgwood, p. 306.

Begotten from the dead, the Prince of the kings of the earth, how to make full proof of their ministry, that they may be free from the blood of all men; how to feed the flock of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood! To this end they are all assembled together. And what is the substance of all his instructions? 'Reverend brethren, I charge you all, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and warn, and arm, and fortify all mankind —against a people called Methodists.'

"Is it possible? Could your lordship discern no other enemies of the Gospel of Christ? Are there no Papists, no Deists in the land? Have the Methodists (so-called) monopolised all the sins, as well as errors, in the nation? Is Methodism the only spreading sin to be found without the Bills of Mortality?"[1]

Bishop Lavington added himself later to the choir of bishops lifting up their voices in rebuke of Methodism, and his contribution to the angry music was of a very shrill kind. Bishop Lavington, says Miss Wedgwood with feminine energy, "deserves to be coupled with the men who flung dead cats and rotten eggs at the Methodists, not with those who assailed their tenets with arguments, or even serious rebuke." The particular missile Lavington flung at Methodism was the charge that it was but Roman Catholicism thinly disguised. Methodism reproduced, he asserted, every evil quality of Romanism; its bigotry, its fanaticism, its falsehood. Bishop Lavington made an excursion into heathen realms in search of a parallel to Methodism, and found it in the Eleusinian mysteries. In the filthiest reading of those mysteries the Bishop discovers what he thinks is a final explanation of Methodism; it is the work of some evil spirit, a sort of magical operation of diabolical illusion.

Both Wesley and Whitefield replied to Bishop Lavington, Wesley in a tone of severity, Whitefield in a gentler note; and for once Whitefield proved the more formidable disputant. Gentleness is sometimes a more effective weapon than anger. He showed, with fine and resistless logic, that Bishop Lavington's attack on the enthusiasm of the new movement was an assault rather upon Christianity than upon Methodism. The episcopal logic that con-

[1] Wedgwood, p. 310.

demned Wesley and Whitefield would have smitten with equal fury St. Peter and St. Paul.

Bishop Horne, of Norwich, showed a better temper than his brother bishops, but his logic was as feeble and as strange as theirs, and his dislike of Methodism as acute. In a sermon preached before the University of Oxford he charged "the new lights of the tabernacle and the Foundry" with evil teaching as to faith and lax teaching as to morality. "Have you ever read," Wesley replied, "the writings of which you speak?" As a matter of fact Horne had not thought it necessary to read Wesley's writings before replying to them. For Horne, as for many other disputants, the business of refuting his opponent's opinions was made much easier by taking the precaution of omitting to know what they were. "Had you only taken the trouble of reading one tract —the 'Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,'" said Wesley, "you would have seen that a great part of what you affirm is what I never denied." And he proceeded to show, what indeed was obvious, that all he taught was found in the Articles and in the Bible.

Warburton, the great literary bully of his day, fell upon the Methodists with a bludgeon. Warburton was by original profession an attorney, a calling for which nature plainly intended him, but ill-fortune, both for himself and for the Church, made him a bishop; though De Quincey suggests that Warburton's betaking himself to long sleeves and an apron saved the twelve judges of that day from being driven mad by his amazing gifts of angry controversy. Bentley dismissed Warburton's scholarship by saying that he was "a man of monstrous appetite but bad digestion"; and a competent critic has sufficiently described his controversial style by saying that Warburton's stock argument is a threat to cudgel any one who disputes his opinion.

Warburton's arrogance soared to strange altitudes. His creed, says Leslie Stephen, might be summed up in the words, "There is but one God, and Warburton is His attorney-general!" He led for years "the life of a terrier in a rat-pit worrying all sorts of theological vermin." It was his agreeable habit to describe his

opponents as "wretches, the most contemptible for their facts, the most infernal for their morals." And this terrier in long sleeves and episcopal apron treated the Wesleys as so much vermin to be worried, and with a sort of canine relish.

How a divine of this temper assailed such men as Whitefield and the Wesleys may be guessed. He declared that the Holy Spirit had fulfilled His office when the canon of Scripture was completed. It was mere fanaticism to claim the enlightening grace of that Spirit in modern days; as if, Warburton shouted, in indignant tones, "it needed the further assistance of the Holy Spirit to explain His own meaning." Then this "father in God" fell upon John Wesley personally. He was cowardly, he was false, he was vindictive; he challenged persecution and then ran away from it; he was a mere wily and malignant hypocrite, &c. &c. And these were the kindest words that a bishop of the Anglican Church could find to expend on a son of that Church who was toiling with an intensity of zeal, unparalleled since apostolic days, to bring fallen men and women into Christ's kingdom!

Who reads these faded pamphlets and letters in which still smoulder the fires of far-off and long-dead controversies finds himself irresistibly on Wesley's side; and this is not merely because he writes better English, employs a more convincing logic, and bears himself with a finer temper than his opponents. He dwells visibly on a higher level than they. He represents a different religious climate. Here is a man who sees the real end for which all Church machinery exists; and he will not sacrifice these great ends for some small, irrelevant—not to say impertinent—question of machinery. For him, at least, the end is more than the means, and nobler. Moorfields, where such vast open-air crowds hung on Wesley's preaching, happened to be in the ecclesiastical parish of a certain Dr. Buckley, otherwise quite unknown to history; and the Bishop of London, who thought much of his clergy's rights and little of the sad crowds outside all the churches, wept rhetorical tears through a whole episcopal charge over the injuries Dr. Buckley

suffered by Wesley preaching in the open air within the bounds of his parish. Here are a few sentences from Wesley's reply:—

"There are, in and near Moorfields, ten thousand poor souls, for whom Christ died, rushing headlong into hell. Is Dr. Buckley, the parochial minister, both willing and able to stop them? If so, let it be done, and I have no place in these parts. I go, and call other sinners to repentance. But if, after all that he has done, and all that he can do, they are still in the broad way to destruction, let me see if God will put a word even in my mouth."

Later will be discussed the whole subject of the relation betwixt the Church of England and Wesley, and the events which compelled him to form what proved to be a separate Church. But the general attitude of the Church towards the revival is to be judged by the utterances of its leaders, such as we have described. And the example of the bishops provoked, as was natural, rough imitation. Bishops wrote treatises against the Methodists; the clergy preached sermons against them; the mob flung stones. Each class used its own weapons. Lawn sleeves in episcopal palaces, when translated into the vernacular, became mere mud and cudgels. The clergy, it may be added, not seldom carried their hate of the revival to the sacramental table itself. Thus Charles Wesley records in his Journal:—

"*Sunday, July* 27.—I heard a miserable sermon at Temple Church, recommending religion as the most likely way to raise a fortune. After it proclamation was made that all should depart who were not of the parish. While the shepherd was driving away the lambs, I stayed, suspecting nothing, till the clerk came to me, and said, 'Mr. Beecher bids you go away; for he will not give you the Sacrament.' I went to the vestry door, and mildly desired Mr. Beecher to admit me. He asked, 'Are you of this parish?' I answered, 'Sir, you see I am a clergyman.' Dropping his first pretence, he charged me with rebellion in expounding the Scripture without authority, and said, in express words, 'I repel you from the Sacrament.' I replied, 'I cite you to answer this before Jesus Christ at the day of judgment.' This enraged him above measure. He called out, 'Here! take away

this man!' The constables were ordered to attend; I suppose lest the furious colliers should take the Sacrament by force. But I saved them the trouble of taking away 'this man,' and quietly retired."

What profit is there recalling to human memory such old, far-off, unhappy, and now forgotten, conflicts? But this controversy, like that with the Moravians, and that with Whitefield, helped to shape history. And the history of which the Methodist Church to-day is the outcome cannot be understood without the tale of this dispute being told.

# CHAPTER V

## THE CONFERENCE

It was clear, almost at the first breath, that Wesley's work was charged with strange forces and unguessed possibilities, and, as we have seen, it quickly took a great scale. Within the brief period of five years (1739–44) it was visibly stirring England. It found everywhere hearers in multitudes; its converts were to be counted by thousands. What was in progress was not so much a revival as a religious revolution.

At this stage Wesley himself seems to become vaguely conscious of the momentum of the forces stirring about him. He sees new agencies springing to existence under his hands. He catches a dim and broken vision of the possibility of his work. And with the true instinct of a great leader he sets himself to create a sort of regulating centre for the movement. It was necessary to give clearness to its theology, method to its zeal, order to its energies, discipline to its results. Wesley was by natural genius intolerant of confusion. He must weave into one close-knitted, methodical plan all the forces and agencies of which he was the personal centre. So on June 25, 1744, he called his first Conference; a council in which, with a few spirits most akin to his own, he may formulate plans for the spiritual campaign now in progress.

It consisted of just ten men, the two Wesleys themselves and four other clergymen — Hodges, rector of Wenvoe; Piers, vicar of Bexley; Taylor, vicar of Quintin, and John Merriton. To these were added later four lay preachers who had not the status of ministers—Thomas Maxfield, John Downs, Thomas Richards, and John Bennet. This little company met in the Foundry. Its members were, in one sense, an unpicturesque group, and no one at the moment could have discovered in their meeting any special significance. They met under the shadow of great

events. The country was at war with France. The young Pretender was preparing to land in Scotland; civil war was on the point of breaking out. The Habeas Corpus Act was suspended. One Cabinet was tottering to its fall, another about to be formed.

It was at the moment when great events of this scale were in the air, and amid the clash and dust of stormiest politics, that this tiny group, most of them utterly unknown men, met day by day to discuss points of theology. No gathering could well seem more insignificant. Yet, judged by its historical consequences, that unpicturesque gathering in the Foundry is the most important even 1744 witnessed. It was the first Methodist Conference! It created unconsciously the most remarkable, and in some senses the most powerful, ecclesiastical council modern Christianity knows; a machinery which is to-day the effective instrument of government for a Church of nearly 30,000,000 people.

Who looks with meditative eyes at that little cluster of grave-faced men may see in it a curious reflex of Wesley's work at the moment, and a prophecy of its coming development.

Methodism at this stage was a movement within the Anglican Church itself. It was a spiritual revival which found its inspiration and its leadership in a group of Anglican ministers. So of the ten persons who formed the first Methodist Conference six were, fitly enough, Anglican divines. But the movement was destined to run far beyond the boundaries of the Anglican Church. It was to give a new development to the Christian ministry itself, and to confer on laymen a partnership in church life and work hitherto unknown. And so, with prophetic fitness, of the ten men four were lay preachers, upon whose heads no ordaining hands had yet been laid.

The laymen, it is true, were in that first Conference only by sufferance. The six clergymen met together first. The earliest question asked was, "Shall any of our lay brethren be present at this Conference?" When contemplated through ecclesiastical spectacles Wesley's helpers were still only "lay brethren," although they were given up to the work of preaching. The recorded and sufficiently cautious answer to the question is, "We agree to

invite from time to time such as we think proper." Then came the question, "Which of them shall we invite to-day?" The answer is the four names given above. When the second Conference was held in Bristol a year later, it consisted again of ten men, and of these seven were laymen, and one was not even a preacher, and never became one. For a wide space of sad years in later time laymen had no place in Methodist Conferences; but it must never be forgotten that they formed part of their original constitution.

The first Conference makes its appearance amid the fervours of a great spiritual work, and, as might be expected, its temper was intensely earnest. Its earliest recorded resolutions run:—

"That all things be considered as in the immediate presence of God. That we meet with single eye, and as little children, who have everything to learn. That every point which is proposed may be examined to the foundation."[1]

It was asked again: "How may the time of this Conference be made more eminently a time of watching unto prayer?" The answer is: "1. While we are conversing, let us have an especial care to set God always before us. 2. In the intermediate hours, let us visit none but the sick, and spend all the time that remains in retirement. 3. Let us therein give ourselves to prayer for one another, and for a blessing upon this our labour."

This Conference was plainly no mere debating society. It was to work as well as argue!

The first stage of the Conference—it lasted six days—was spent in very keen and earnest discussion of the question of "What to teach?" And who reads the "conversations" which follow, and which range over such great subjects as justification, faith, sanctification, &c., might well conclude that this first of all Methodist Conferences was setting out on a cruise in search of a creed. Here was a group of divines painfully occupied in rediscovering Christianity! But this is not so. These serious-faced divines and laymen had no theology which

[1] Myles, p. 36.

wandered outside the limits of the Thirty-nine Articles. But what they were doing was very significant. They were testing and re-defining these doctrines in the light of conscious spiritual experience. The definitions of justification, repentance, faith, &c., which they record, are curiously simple and direct. Here are examples:—

"Q. What is it to be justified? A. To be pardoned, and received into God's favour, into such a state, that if we continue therein, we shall be finally saved. Q. Is Faith the condition of Justification? A. Yes; for every one who believes is justified. . . Q. What is Faith? A. Faith in general is a divine supernatural Elenchos (demonstration) of things not seen; *i.e.* of past, future, or spiritual things: it is a spiritual sight of God and the things of God. Therefore, Repentance is a low species of Faith—*i.e.* a supernatural sense of an offended God. Then, a sinner is convinced by the Holy Ghost. 'Christ loved me and gave Himself for me.' This is the faith by which he is justified or pardoned the moment he receives it. Immediately the same Spirit bears witness, 'Thou art pardoned. Thou hast redemption in His blood.' And this is saving faith, whereby the love of God is shed abroad in His heart."[1]

Here is theology, not in the form of metaphysics, but of verified human experience. Every syllable of these definitions has for this group of men been tested in the alembic of consciousness.

It is still amusing to notice how that first Conference tried to maintain its theological equipoise amid the shocks of controversy. Thus it proceeds to painfully interrogate itself, in the form of question and answer, as to the correctness of its own views:—

"Q. Have we not, unawares, leaned too much towards Calvinism? A. We are afraid we have. Q. Have we not also leaned towards Antinomianism? A. We are afraid we have."

But the second Conference met when the horizon was clearer and the heats of controversy had begun to cool. It finds that the pendulum has swung too far in one direction. The points of agreement rather than of dif-

[1] Myles, p. 27.

ference have now to be emphasised. So we have a new record:—

"Q. Does not the truth of the Gospel lie very near both to Calvinism and Antinomianism? A. Indeed it does: as it were, within a hair's-breadth. So that it is altogether foolish and sinful, because we do not quite agree with one or the other, to run from them as far as we can. Q. Wherein may we come to the very edge of Calvinism? A. (1) In ascribing all good to the free grace of God. (2) In denying all natural freewill, and all power antecedent to grace; and (3) In excluding all merit from man; even for what he does by the grace of God. Q. Wherein may we come to the edge of Antinomianism? A. (1) In exalting the merits and love of Christ. (2) In rejoicing evermore. Q. Does faith supersede (set aside the necessity of) holiness or good works? A. In no wise. So far from it that it implies both, as a cause does its effects."

Where else in history can we find a company of theologians, just emerging from a controversy, so honestly anxious to sober their own views in this wise fashion! How intensely practical, and how closely personal, again, was the test by which these early Methodist preachers tried their theology, may be judged from a fragment of one of the conversations in the Conference of 1745, at Bristol:—

"Q. Do we empty men of their own righteousness, as we did at first? . . . A. This was at first one of our principal points. And it ought to be so still. For, till all other foundations are overturned, they cannot build upon Christ. Q. Did we not then purposely throw them into convictions? Into strong sorrow and fear? Nay, did we not strive to make them inconsolable? Refusing to be comforted. A. We did, and so we should do still. For the stronger the conviction, the speedier is the deliverance. And none so soon receive the peace of God as those who steadily refuse all other comfort. Q. Let us consider a particular case. Were you, Jonathan Reeves, before you received the peace of God, convinced that notwithstanding all you did, or could do, you were in a state of damnation? J. R.: I was convinced of it as fully as that I am now alive. Q. Are you sure that conviction was from God? J. R.: I can have no doubt it was. Q. What do you mean by a state of damnation? J. R.: A state wherein if a man dies he perisheth for ever. Q. How did this conviction end?

J. R.: I had first a strong hope that God would deliver me, and this brought a degree of peace. But I had not that solid peace of God till Christ was revealed in me."[1]

These, it is clear, are theologians of quite a new type. They keep their feet on the solid earth. The articles in their creed beat in perfect rhythm with the facts of their consciousness. And yet they recognise quite frankly the law of development in their beliefs. Thus the second Conference asks:—

"Q. Wherein does our doctrine now differ from that we preached when at Oxford? A. Chiefly in these two points: (1) We then knew nothing of that righteousness of faith, in justification; nor (2) of the nature of faith itself, as implying a consciousness of pardon."

The first Conference discussed some questions which belong to the realm of casuistry, such as: "How far the Christian man may submit his judgment to others;" "Whether it is lawful to bear arms;" "How far it is a duty to obey a bishop," &c. It discussed at length "The Society and its Officers," and prepared rules which are practically the marching orders for the Methodist soldiery for all time, the translation into spiritual terms of, say, Lord Wolseley's "Soldier's Pocket-Book." But one subject debated was of what may be called prophetic importance—the relation of the new movement to the Anglican Church, and the probable developments in those relations which lay in the future. The debate went with admirable directness to this, the most important of all problems:—

"Q. Do we separate from the Church? A. We conceive not: we hold communion therewith, for conscience' sake, by constantly attending both the Word preached, and the sacraments administered therein. Q. What then do they mean who say, 'You separate from the Church'? A. We certainly cannot tell. Perhaps they have no determinate meaning, unless by the Church they mean themselves—*i.e.* that part of the clergy who accuse us of preaching false doctrine. And it is sure we do herein separate from them, by maintaining that which they deny. Q. Is it not probable that your hearers after your death will be scattered into all sects and parties? Or, that they will form themselves into a

[1] Myles, p. 47.

distinct sect? A. 1. We are persuaded that the body of our hearers will, even after our death, remain in the Church unless they be thrust out. 2. We believe, notwithstanding, either that they will be thrust out, or that they will leaven the whole Church. 3. We do, and will do, all we can to prevent those consequences which are supposed likely to happen after our death. 4. But we cannot, with a good conscience, neglect the present opportunity of saving souls while we live, for fear of consequences which may possibly or probably happen after we are dead." [1]

It would be difficult to surpass for cool-headed and practical wisdom the words of that closing resolution.

No one can read the minutes of that first Conference without seeing that already—though quite unconsciously as far as the persons most affected were concerned—a Church, singularly practical and complete in organisation, was crystallising into shape. All the permanent features of Methodist organisation are clearly visible within five years of Wesley preaching his first open-air sermon. That first Conference, for example, asked the question: "What officers belong to this Society?" and the answer shows how nearly complete, even at that stage, was the organisation of Methodism. As early as 1747 Wesley laid down "Rules for the Stewards of the Methodist Societies," and these are an exquisite reflex not only of his business sagacity, but of his consideration for the poor. They might very happily govern the Church affairs of Methodism to-day:—

"1. You are to be men full of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom, that you may do all things in a manner acceptable to God. 2. You are weekly to transact the temporal affairs of the Society. 3. You are to begin and end every meeting with earnest prayer to God for a blessing on all your undertakings. 4. You are to do nothing without the consent of the minister, either actually had or reasonably presumed. 5. You are to consider whenever you meet, 'God is here.' Therefore be serious. Utter no railing word. Speak as in His presence, and to the glory of His great Name. 6. When anything is debated, let one at once stand up and speak, the rest giving attention. And let him speak just loud enough to be heard, in love and in the spirit of meekness. 7. In all debates, you are to watch over your spirits, avoiding, as fire, all clamour

[1] Myles, p. 47.

and contention, being swift to hear, slow to speak; in honour every man preferring another before himself. 8. If you cannot relieve, do not grieve the poor. Give them soft words, if nothing else. Abstain from either sour looks or harsh words. Let them be glad to come, even though they should go empty away. 9. Put yourselves in the place of every poor man, and deal with him as you would God should deal with you." [1]

Some of the early agencies of Methodism have not survived the test of time. The band meetings, for example, represent the swing of the spiritual pendulum in a dangerous direction. They came perilously near the confessional, and had some of the mischiefs of the confessional. They have disappeared. But the main features of Methodism, as Wesley even at this early stage of his work shaped them, have survived, and amongst these the most conspicuous is the Conference, whose genesis is here described. A whole sisterhood of such Conferences is in energetic operation to-day; and each remains, in substance if not in detail, faithful to the original type.

The Conference, indeed, as a bit of ecclesiastical machinery, is perhaps the most original contribution that Methodism has made to church history. Methodism itself to-day would be a mere jumble of unrelated fragments but for this great court, which is at once the symbol and the instrument of its unity. In the Methodist system the Conference is the thinking organ of the Church; the instrument of government; the nerve-centre that co-ordinates all the forces of the spiritual organism, and puts them under the government of a single purpose. No other council known to religious history has quite the functions of the Methodist Conference. It is a parliament clothed with all the functions of legislation; a cabinet of administration; a court of discipline; the machinery by which the great system of the itinerancy, which is characteristic of the pastorate of the Methodist Churches, is regulated. Hidden in the itinerancy, it may be added, is a silent, unplanned, almost unrecognised but most effective instrument of discipline; a force which secures all the ends without the forms of disciplinary process, and which goes far to explain the doctrinal purity of the Methodist Church.

[1] Myles, p. 36.

Methodist Churches exist to-day under every sky, and they are naturally affected in many details by their social and geographical environment. In Great Britain, for example, the parent Conference itself runs some risk of suffering, in order and energy, by mere congestion of numbers. A public meeting of nearly a thousand men, all trained talkers, is the worst instrument for the discharge of business the wit of man ever invented, or the patience of man ever suffered. We must go to Poland with its "liberum veto" for its analogue. In the British Conference, by the mere necessity of its scale, the work has to be done by committees; and the Conference itself, except on broad matters of policy, is practically a mere registering instrument for its own committees. This is not a wholesome state of things, for it represents a certain divorce of power from responsibility; the committees have power without responsibility; the Conference has responsibility without power. The system, in a word, is apt to become Venetian, and to give power to a few who meet and decide without the tonic of publicity.

In the United States the episcopal system modifies the Conference; yet the bishops are the creation of the Conference and remain its servants. In Canada and Australia, the mere scale of geography has modified the structure and functions of the Conference. In Australia, for example, the annual Conferences are purely administrative bodies. The General Conference, which meets every four years, is a representative body, acts as a court of review, and is the sole depository of legislative power. The separation of functions represents, scientifically, the highest stages of any organism. And in actual practice the separation of the administrative and legislative functions in the Conference is attended with many happy results. Administration is more effective than under the old system; while the fact that legislation is confined to a body which meets only once in four years has some obvious advantages. The opportunity of making legislative experiments comes only at long intervals.

But under all skies, and all geographical and social conditions, the Methodist Conference still bears the stamp of the providential impulse from which it sprang, and of the masterful will, and the statesman-like intellect, of the

great leader who gave it form. It is not a mere debating society. It is not a bit of unqualified democracy. Laymen, it is true, as far as the finances and business interests of the Church are concerned, have been taken into frankest partnership; but, speaking generally, the pastoral office is strictly conserved, and all that relates to the training and discipline of ministers, and their distribution over the pastoral charges of the Church, is in the hands of the ministers.

And where in all ecclesiastical history is to be found so effective an instrument of government? The great Councils of the Middle Ages, like so many modern ecclesiastical assemblies, were in the main huge debating societies. They emerge in the crisis of some heresy; they settle—or fail to settle—some dispute about doctrine, and they vanish. Under an episcopal form of Church government the Church Council can hardly have any other than debating functions. Churches, again, of the Congregational type, or Presbyterian Churches, with a fixed pastorate, can have no governing court with a range, both of unchallenged authority and of practical work, which belongs to the Methodist Conference. In its Conference the Methodist system reaches its natural and highest expression. It is a body which does not merely reign; it governs. And it governs effectively and without challenge.

# CHAPTER VI

## A YEAR OF CRISIS

THE year 1764 is, in many respects, a critical period in the evolution of the Methodist Church. It marks the close of one stage and the beginning of another. It was twenty-five years since Wesley stood on the hillside at Kingswood and preached his first sermon in the open air. For a quarter of a century the Revival had now flowed on without pause or ebb, and it was visibly reshaping the religious life of England. Wesley's societies were scattered all over the United Kingdom, each society a little germinating point of spiritual life. Wesley had gathered round himself, and was training in his helpers, a new order of Christian workers, in some respects curiously like the preaching friars of the Middle Ages, or the "poor preachers" whom Wycliffe sent out; but with a better creed, a gladder message, and a wiser organisation than either. There is no other spiritual movement recorded in history since apostolic days that shows from its very birth such sustained energy, and such power of continual advance, as did the movement of which Whitefield and the Wesleys were the leaders.

But twenty-five years in such a work make up a wide space of time, and bring with them many changes. Wesley's comrades, one by one, had dropped from his side. Whitefield was broken in health. His American orphanage filled an almost absurdly wide space in his mental horizon. He had never attempted to build up an enduring spiritual structure. The crowd, swayed by his rushing speech as a field of yellow, rustling corn is swayed by the wind, was his ideal; it represented his one effective form of work. To patiently weave over the surface of the three kingdoms a great network of tiny societies was a task quite alien to his genius. As he himself said, "I should but weave a Penelope's web if I formed societies.

and if I should form them I have no proper assistants to take care of them. I intend, therefore, to go about preaching the Gospel to every creature." But as a matter of fact Whitefield no longer had physical energy enough for his preaching services, and four years later he died.

Charles Wesley, too, was falling out of the work. His health was shaken. He was married, and had now the cares of a family. The poet in him had largely taken the place of the preacher, and the evangelist gave place more and more to the High Churchman. There were some twenty-seven years of strenuous work yet before Wesley, but it was to be lonely work. From 1764 he stands out a solitary figure, sole leader and representative of the Great Revival.

At this point, too, the relation of the work to the Church of England becomes more definite. The work began within the Church; its originator and leaders were Anglican clergymen; and it was one of the happy possibilities of the Revival that it might have remained a movement within the Church, transforming its whole spirit and outlook. The onfall of the bishops had helped to wreck this possibility, and at this stage in Wesley's career it had become clear, even to the reluctant eyes of Wesley himself, that the Anglican Church and the Revival were to flow in different channels.

Wesley's own policy was definite, consistent, and perfectly intelligible. He would not by any act of his own separate from the Church. He set in his own person a shining example of loyalty to its services. He held his followers to them with all the energy of his masterful will. He whipped them away from all thought of dissent with constant rebuke. But he held separation from the Church to be—not unlawful—but only inexpedient. From the first, indeed, he saw with clearest vision that separation would probably come; nay, that under some circumstances it *ought* to come. He only hoped it would not be till he was dead.

In his first Conference (in 1744), a Conference in which, out of ten persons, six were Anglican clergymen, the whole case is stated, as we have seen, with luminous clearness, and with almost prophetic foresight. In the Conference of 1746 the questions of a National Church

and of the divine right of episcopacy were again discussed at length, and answered once more in a strongly anti-sacerdotal sense.

But there were forces working both ways. In the Conference of 1752 Charles Wesley drew up, and persuaded the leading members of the Conference to sign, a remarkable pledge, the final clause of which was a promise "never to leave the communion of the Church of England without the consent of all those whose names were subjoined." John Wesley, who was always less of a Churchman than Charles, defined his position four years later in the following terms:—

"I still believe the episcopal form of Church government to be scriptural and apostolical. I mean well agreeing with the practice and writings of the Apostles. But that it is prescribed in Scripture I do not believe. This opinion, which I once zealously espoused, I have been heartily ashamed of ever since I read Bishop Stillingfleet's 'Irenicon.' I think he has unanswerably proved that neither Christ nor His Apostles prescribe any particular form of Church government; and that the plea of divine right for diocesan episcopacy was never heard of in the primitive Church.

"I would take some pains to recover any one from error, or to reconcile him to our Church, I mean to the Church of England; from which I do not separate yet, and probably never shall; but I would take much more pains to recover any one from sin."[1]

In the Conference of the same year (1756) again it is recorded: "We largely considered the necessity of keeping in the Church, and using the clergy with tenderness. And there was no dissenting voice. God gave us all to be of one mind and of one judgment."

Wesley himself adds: "My brother and I closed the Conference by a solemn declaration of our purpose never to separate from the Church. And all our brethren concurred therein."[2]

In 1758 Wesley published "Twelve Reasons against Separating from the Church of England." The sum of the whole runs: "Whether it be lawful or not (which itself may be disputed, being not so clear a point as some may imagine), it is by no means expedient for us to separate from the Established Church."[3] Charles

[1] Tyerman, vol. ii. p. 244. [2] Myles, p. 80. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Wesley, always on this point more vehement than his brother, appends to the "reasons" a statement which runs:—

"I subscribe to them with all my heart. Only with regard to the first: I am quite clear, that it is neither expedient, nor lawful, for me to separate, and I never had the least inclination or temptation so to do. My affection for the Church is as strong as ever; and I clearly see my calling, which is to live and die in her communion. This, therefore, I am determined to do, the Lord being my helper."[1]

In a private letter written at the same time, he says: "I should have broken off from the Methodists and my brother, in 1752, but for the agreement. I think every preacher should sign that agreement, or leave us."[2]

Nothing can be clearer in all this history than Wesley's personal loyalty to the Church of England, and his deep, and even passionate, desire to retain his converts within the boundaries of that Church. But the resistless logic of events made changes inevitable. Wesley was losing one by one his spiritual allies in the Church itself. The Bishops were, from the first, openly hostile, and no bond of interest or sympathy linked the Church any longer to the Revival. Wesley in 1756 was urged by his Church friends to disband his army of itinerating preachers, and to hand over his societies to the care of the parish clergy. He discussed the proposal with great calmness and frankness:—

"First, who shall feed them with the milk of the Word? The ministers of their parishes? Alas! they cannot; they themselves neither know, nor live, nor teach the Gospel." As to his helpers, Wesley adds, "Here is another difficulty still: what authority have I to forbid their doing what I believe God has called them to do? I apprehend, indeed, that there ought, if possible, to be both an outward and inward call to this work; yet, if one of the two be supposed wanting, I had rather want the outward than the inward call. I rejoice that I am called to preach the Gospel both by God and man. Yet, I acknowledge, I had rather have the Divine without the human, than the human without the Divine call."[3]

He had at that time thirty-four societies in Cornwall alone, and he asks: "Will they prosper as well when they

[1] Myles, p. 84. [2] Tyerman, vol. ii. p. 245.
[3] Tyerman, ii. p. 250.

are left as sheep without a shepherd? The experiment has been tried again and again, and always with the same event."

In 1764 Wesley wrote his famous circular letter to all the evangelical clergy who might be supposed to sympathise with the Revival. The letter is a noble plea for patience, toleration, union, and help. "Why," he asks, in conclusion, "cannot we think well of and honour one another? Wish all good, all grace, all gifts, all success, yea, greater than our own, to each other? Expect God will answer our wish, rejoice in every appearance thereof, and praise Him for it? Readily believe good of each other, as readily as we once believed evil?" That fine appeal was addressed to betwixt fifty and sixty clergymen, all of whom, by character and religious experience, were in sympathy with Wesley; but only three vouchsafed an answer; one of them being Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham, who was one of Wesley's closest friends. If Wesley's friends stood aloof in this spirit, the mood of the Church at large may be guessed!

Some twelve clergy were present at the Conference of 1764; but they were present merely to urge that Wesley should withdraw the preachers from every parish where there was a clergyman "of a religious spirit"! Charles Wesley supported the proposal, and, in the words of John Pawson, who was present, "honestly told us that if he was a settled minister in any particular place, we should not preach there." To whom Mr. Hampson replied, "I would preach there and never ask your leave, and should have as good a right to do so as you would have." The new wine, it was clear, could not be permanently held in the old bottles!

It may be added that a great wave of spiritual life, which during this period was sweeping through the Methodist societies, and lifting them up to a higher level of energy and gladness, had the curious effect of widening the breach between Wesley and his natural allies in the Anglican Church. At the end of 1762, Wesley writes: "Many years ago my brother frequently said, 'Your day of Pentecost is not fully come. But I doubt not, it will. And you will then hear of persons sanctified, as frequently as you do now of persons justified. Any unprejudiced

person who has read the accounts in my Journals may observe that it was now fully come.'"[1]

"The true day of Pentecost" had, indeed, come for Wesley and his followers. Sanctification had been hitherto a doctrine debated by many, but an experience realised by few. At this period, however, for thousands the doctrine had become a true spiritual experience. Wesley's journals are full of records of the spiritual work in triumphant progress.

Now the doctrine itself, as yet, lacked clear definition. Wesley, in formal terms, never claimed sanctification as his personal experience; but he reached at last a definition of the doctrine which is marked by admirable simplicity and clearness. He defined it partly by negatives:—

"Absolute and infallible perfection I never contended for; sinless perfection I do not contend for, seeing it is not Scriptural. A perfection such as enables a person to fulfil the whole law, and so need not the merits of Christ, I do not acknowledge. I do now, and always did, protest against it."

Then, translating the doctrine into positive terms, he says:—

"By Christian perfection I mean (as I have said again and again) the so loving God and our neighbour as to 'rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks.' He that experiences this is Scripturally perfect."

But all good things have their characteristic risks, and this doctrine of sanctification, or "perfection," ran, or was apt to run—especially with the half-taught and ill-balanced—into fanatical extremes. This happened in the London societies, and some of Wesley's most trusted helpers were carried away. George Bell, an ex-Life Guardsman, was one of his most valued comrades. Long afterwards Wesley records how for years he had found in Bell a loyal sympathy and helpfulness no one else yielded him. Maxfield was the earliest of his helpers, and one held in special confidence. Both these were at this moment swept away in a wave of fanaticism. Bell ran to the wildest extremes. He fixed a day for the end of the world; openly renounced

[1] Myles, p. 87.

Wesley, and drew off many of the members. All this, of course, shocked the sober Anglicans. Wesley appealed to his brother Charles to come up to London to help him to keep the societies steady, but the appeal was vain. He wrote again, in a key of mingled sadness but of grim resolve:—"I perceive *verba fiunt mortuo;* so I say no more about your coming to London. Here stand I; and I shall stand, with or without human help, if God is with us."

Wesley, left to himself, dealt with the trouble with fine courage and decision. He expelled Bell from the society, and publicly denounced his follies; but he could not arrest the mischievous effect of this outburst of extravagance in the societies. It widened fatally the breach betwixt himself and those who had been his closest friends.

Wesley felt keenly the desertion of his old comrades. He writes on March 20, 1763, to Lady Huntingdon, in a tone of bitterness rarely audible in his letters:—

"By the mercy of God, I am still alive, and following the work to which He has called me, although without any help, even in the most trying times, from those of whom I might have expected it. Their voice seemed to be rather, 'Down with him, down with him; even to the ground.' I mean (for I use no circumlocution) Mr. Madan, Mr. Haweis, Mr. Berridge, and (I am sorry to say it) Mr. Whitefield. Only Mr. Romaine has shown a truly sympathising spirit, and acted the part of a brother. As to the prophecies of these poor wild men, George Bell and half-a-dozen more, I am not a jot more accountable for them than Mr. Whitefield, having never countenanced them in any degree, but opposed them from the moment I heard them; neither have these extravagances any foundation in any doctrine which I teach."

As a matter of fact, the one loyal friend whom Wesley thought he still had, Romaine, had by this time forsaken him too. Lady Huntingdon sent on to him the letter from which the preceding extract is taken; Romaine wrote in reply:—

"Enclosed is poor Mr. John Wesley's letter. The contents of it, as far as I am concerned, surprised me; for no one has spoken more freely of what is now passing among the people than myself. I pity Mr. John from my heart. His societies are in great con-

fusion ; and the point, which brought them into the wilderness of rant and madness, is still insisted on as much as ever. I fear the end of this delusion."

It is clear from all this, that, at a moment of crisis, when his societies were in peril of being broken asunder by extravagances of life and doctrine, and when his most trusted helpers were failing him, Wesley was abandoned by his allies amongst the Anglican clergy, even his brother for the moment failing him. Wesley bore the cruel burden thus cast upon him with noble resolution, and the crisis passed. But the incident had enduring results. It helped to decide the whole relation of Methodism to the Church of England. Wesley yet remained, in his own person and sympathies, stubbornly loyal to the Church. The spiritual movement of which he was now the sole head should not, if he could help it, drift into dissent. But the last ties that bound it to the Church were being cut—on the side of the Church itself!

If any one wishes an illustration of the general temper of the Anglican Church to this great spiritual movement after it had been nearly thirty years in operation, and was visibly transfiguring the moral life of England, let him take the following incident: On March 9, 1768, six students were expelled from the University of Oxford for holding Methodistical tenets, and taking upon them to pray, and to read and expound the Scriptures in a private house. The head of the House to which the students belonged defended their doctrine from the Thirty-nine Articles, and spoke in the highest terms of the piety and high character of the accused men, but in vain. The principal of the College, after sentence had been pronounced, said that as these six gentlemen were expelled for having too much religion, it would be very proper to inquire into the conduct of some who had too little. What fact can be more significant than that so late as 1768 students of high character were expelled from the University of Oxford for no other offence than that of "holding Methodistical tenets!"

The difficulty created by the failure of his clerical allies explains another much-debated step which Wesley took at this time. The larger societies were accustomed

to receive the sacrament in their own chapels, but it was physically impossible for Wesley himself to do this work. No clergyman would any longer help him, and Wesley had the High Churchman's invincible reluctance to allow any unordained preacher to administer the sacraments. His first helper, Maxfield, had been ordained by an Irish bishop, and was accustomed to administer the sacrament in London during Wesley's absence, but even Maxfield had now forsaken him. At this moment a bishop of the Greek Church named Erasmus was in London. Wesley took pains to ascertain that his credentials were genuine, and then consented to some of his helpers receiving ordination from him.

But this was only a temporary expedient; it carried with it some strange theological implications, and it created new and instant troubles. Charles Wesley was filled with unappeasable anger; and this, in turn, kindled amongst the little group of ordained helpers an answering resentment. One of them, John Jones, whom Wesley valued most, and on whom the Greek bishop had laid his hands, left him, and accepted orders in the Anglican Church. Another of the ordained men, Stanniforth, records in his Journal:—

"In the year 1764 I was sent for by Mr. W. to his house. The messenger told me he wanted to speak with me, and I must come immediately. When I came, I found the Grecian bishop with him, who ordained me and three more. But finding it would offend my brethren, I have never availed myself of it to this hour."

On the whole, the Greek ordinations were an ill-advised attempt to meet a difficulty which was to find a later, happier, and more enduring solution.

# CHAPTER VII

## THE DEVELOPING CHURCH

It is very striking, meanwhile, to notice the clear purpose with which, during all this troubled period, Wesley kept loyal to his own ideals, and the insight and vigilance with which he continued to shape the movement under his care, making its discipline perfect and its machinery complete. He saw, for example, with a flash of statesmanlike insight, the need of giving to his work coherence and unity. The societies had burst into the blossom of the class-meeting, with infinite advantage in the way of stimulus and oversight. But the societies as a whole were unrelated fragments. Each class-meeting resembled a tiny living cell; a society was a congeries of such cells. The problem was to knit these scattered cells, or congeries of cells, into one vital organism.

In the Conference of 1763 the question was asked: "Can there be any such thing as a general union of each society throughout England?" A somewhat crude suggestion was offered in reply: "May not all the societies in England be considered as one body, united by one Spirit? May not that in London, the mother church, consult for the good of all the societies? May not the stewards of that society answer letters from all parts, and give advice, at least in temporals?"[1]

But this was obviously no solution to the problem. How could the state of all the societies be known to the stewards of the London societies? Even if this spacious knowledge were attained, and if the stewards were clothed with some power of advice, or of government, this would not knit the societies into a single organism. It would only create a little spiritual oligarchy, which might well become a despotism. Wesley had hardly yet

[1] Myles, p. 90.

realised that in his new order of itinerating "helpers" he was creating a force hitherto unknown in ecclesiastical history, a corporate pastorate; a pastorate which belonged to the whole Church, and not to individual charges in it. When the pastorate became in this way a unit, the churches under the care of such a pastorate must be a unit too. And this corporate pastorate was to find in the annual Conference exactly such an instrument for the government of the Church as a whole as was needed. But Wesley, we repeat, as yet hardly realised the range and power of the very machinery he had created.

All through these troubled years the characteristic institutions of Methodism were swiftly taking shape. The training of the helpers grows in method and thoroughness. The famous "rules of a helper"—rules which still form the marching orders of every Methodist preacher in the world, and are read year by year in every Methodist Synod—belong to this period. Nothing can well be stronger, finer, or loftier than the counsels — counsels which have the accent and the urgency of commands— by which Wesley at this time was moulding the habits of his many agents, and creating traditions for unborn generations. Whoever reads these admonitions finds himself in contact with a very remarkable body of literature. In form they are severely condensed, yet absolutely clear English, English that Swift or Cobbett might have envied, but could not have surpassed. And the moral quality of these admonitions is even more remarkable than their literary energy. The swift, terse, abrupt sentences have the rush and impact of bullets; they are charged with a spiritual intensity which has the clearness of flame without its heat. Wesley's counsels and rebukes are as swift and urgent as messages from the unseen. Here are examples:—

"Sleep not more than you need; talk not more than you need. And never be idle, nor triflingly employed. But if you can do but one—either follow your studies, or instruct the ignorant—let your studies alone; I would throw by all the libraries in the world rather than be guilty of the perdition of one soul." [1]

[1] Myles, p. 115.

Then follows a series of almost fierce self-questionings:—

"Why are we not more knowing? A. Because we are idle. We forget the very first rule, 'Be diligent. Never be unemployed a moment. Never be triflingly employed.' . . .

"Which of you spends as many hours a day in God's work as you did formerly in man's work? We talk, talk—or read history, or what comes next to hand. We must, absolutely *must*, cure this evil, or give up the whole work.

"But how? 1. Read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the morning in this employ, or at least five hours in twenty-four.

"'But I read only the Bible.' Then you ought to teach others to read only the Bible; and, by parity of reason, to hear only the Bible. But if so, you need preach no more. Just so said George Bell. And what is the fruit? Why, now he neither reads the Bible nor anything else. If you need no book but the Bible, you are got above St. Paul. He wanted others, too. Bring the books, says he, but especially the parchments; those written on parchment.

"'But I have no taste for reading.' Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade.

"'But different men have different tastes.' Therefore some may read less than others; but none should read less than this.

"The sum is, Go into every house in course, and teach every one therein, young and old, if they belong to us, to be Christians, inwardly and outwardly. Make every particular plain to their understanding. Fix it in their memory. Write it on their heart. In order to this, there must be line upon line, precept upon precept. I remember to have heard my father asking my mother, 'How could you have the patience to tell that blockhead the same thing twenty times over?' She answered, 'Why, if I had told him but nineteen times, I should have lost all my labour.' What patience, indeed, what love, what knowledge is requisite for this!

"Over and above: wherever there are ten children in a society, spend at least an hour with them twice a week. And do this, not in a dull, dry, formal manner, but in earnest, with your might.

"'But I have no gift for this.' Gift or no gift, you are to do it else you are not called to be a Methodist preacher. Do it as you can, till you can do it as you would."[1]

Wesley's standard for his helpers in every realm was of an heroic pitch. He required them to work with the

[1] Myles, p. 115.

utmost energy of which they were capable; but they must be students as well as workers! No man ever hated ignorance, and the fanaticism bred of ignorance, more than he. Here are examples of the admonitions with which he strove to enforce on his busy helpers the habits and temper of students:—

"What general method of employing our time would you advise us to? A. 1. As often as possible to rise at four. 2. From four to five in the morning, and from five to six in the evening to meditate, pray, and read, partly the Scriptures, with the Notes on the New Testament, partly Kempis and the Instructions for Children, and partly the closely practical parts of the Christian Library. 3. From six in the morning till twelve (allowing an hour for breakfast), to read in order, with much prayer, Bishop Pearson on the Creed, Mr. Boehm's and Nelson's sermons, the remaining parts of the Christian Library, our other tracts and poems, 'Paradise Lost,' and Professor Frank's works.

"How may we be more useful in conversation? A. 1. Fix the end of each conversation before you begin. 2. Watch and pray during the time. 3. Spend two or three minutes every hour in earnest prayer. 4. Rarely spend above an hour at a time in conversing with any one."[1]

Amongst the quaint but intensely practical counsels he gives are some as to the art of escaping popularity:—

"How shall we avoid popularity? We mean such esteem and love from the people as is not for the glory of God. 1. Earnestly pray for a piercing sense of the danger and the sinfulness of it. 2. Take care how you ingratiate yourself with any people by slackness of discipline. 3. Or by any method which another preacher cannot follow. 4. Warn the people among whom you are most of esteeming or loving you too much. 5. Converse sparingly with those who are particularly fond of you."[2]

Times and men are strangely changed since those words were written. What preacher to-day has to study anxiously "how to avoid popularity," or finds any necessity for warning the people amongst whom he labours against "esteeming him or loving him too much"!

Wesley had quite a modern conception of the possibilities of the press as a teaching instrument, and as early as

[1] Myles, p. 97. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

1747 he had organised a tract society. Two years later he began to compile the "Christian Library," a series of fifty volumes. A Methodist might be poor, but Wesley was determined he should not be illiterate. Later he taught his helpers that to put a good book into a home was to plant in it a permanent civilising force; and so they must sell books as diligently as they preached sermons. He says: "Let each of you do like William Pennington: carry books with you through every round. Exert yourselves in this. Be not ashamed. Be not weary. Leave no stone unturned." To one of his preachers he writes: "It is of unspeakable use to spread our practical tracts in every society. Billy Pennington, in one year, sold more of these in Cornwall than had been sold for seven years before. So may you, if you take the same method. Carry one sort of books with you the first time you go the round; another sort the second time; and so on. Preach on the subject at each place; and, after preaching, encourage the congregation to buy and read the tract."

Finance has always, and necessarily, filled a great space in Methodist affairs, and the frugality and business sense which mark Wesley's financial methods are very striking. At first Wesley's helpers were like the Seventy whom Christ sent out as the earliest preachers of Christianity. They took neither purse nor scrip with them. Their pockets were almost as empty as those of mendicant friars, though their heads were better furnished, and their hearts carried a more radiant sunshine. But in due course salaries had to be paid to the men and a provision made for their wives.

The salaries, looked at with modern eyes, were, as we have already shown, of an almost incredibly microscopic scale. What an heroic and long since extinct order of preachers' wives, too, must that first generation of Methodist preachers have discovered, since they could live and clothe themselves decently, and contrive to be cheerful, on an allowance of four shillings a week, with an addition of twenty shillings per quarter for each child! Wesley made a provision for his worn-out preachers, but it was in principle only a form of self-help. A regulation passed in 1763 required each preacher, out of his scanty salary, to contribute ten shillings yearly. This sum was

lodged in the hands of three stewards, and formed a fund out of which allowances were paid for old or sickly preachers, or for their widows. The fund was painfully modest in scale, but it was the germ out of which have grown the great pension funds of modern Methodism.

Wesley, it may be added, had a wholesome horror of debt; a hate of it which perhaps had its root in memories of his debt-contracting and debt-oppressed father. And he tried, but alas! with only imperfect success, to plant his own conscience on this subject amongst his societies. In 1756, when the work had been in progress for sixteen years, the debts of the Connexion, mainly on chapels, amounted to £4000. In 1771 they were not quite £7000, an average debt of less than £100 upon each chapel. These figures seem trivial when compared with the huge financial burdens of modern Methodism. On the Methodist churches of a single colony, with a population of a little over 1,000,000, there is, to-day, carried with smiling courage, nearly forty times the amount of the debt on all the Methodist churches in Great Britain a little over a century ago! Wesley's Church has, somehow, acquired a temper of financial courage which would have left Wesley himself, and the early Methodist Conferences, almost paralysed with mingled amazement and alarm!

In 1767 Wesley started a fund for the extinction of the debts on his chapels. He proposed to raise £12,600 in two years, by subscriptions ranging from 5s. to two guineas. Such a scheme seems strangely modest when it is remembered that in 1900 the Wesleyan Churches of Great Britain raised £1,000,000 in a single effort, while the Methodist Churches in the United States in a similar way raised nearly £4,000,000. But the scheme of 1767 only partially succeeded. Two years afterwards £5000 still remained unpaid; yet Wesley's appeals to his people were pathetic, eloquent, and urgent in what ought to have been a resistless degree. "I think," he wrote to one trusted adherent after another, "I think you love me, and the cause wherein I am engaged. You wish to ease me of any burden you can. You sincerely desire the salvation of souls and the prosperity of the work of God. Will you not then exert yourself on such an occasion as this?"

When in 1769 a second effort was made Wesley wrote:—

"Are the Methodists able to clear this in one year? Yes, as able as they are to clear £50. But are they willing? That I cannot tell. I am sure a few of them are, even of those who have a large measure of worldly goods; yea, and those who are lately increased in substance, who have twice, perhaps ten or twenty times, as much as when they saw me first. Are you one of them? Whether you are or not, whether your substance is less or more, are you willing to give what assistance you can? to do what you can without hurting your family? 'But if I do so, I cannot lay out so much, in such and such things, as I intended.' That is true; but will this hurt you? What, if instead of enlarging, you should, for the present, contract your expenses? spend less, that you may be able to give more. Would there be any harm in this?"[1]

That letter is only a sample of similar communications addressed to other members of his societies. It would be difficult to imagine a more moving appeal, and it was weighted by the whole force of Wesley's life and example. And yet the church debts of that period survived even such an appeal from such a man.

If any one wishes to realise the enormous growth of the Methodist Church in wealth, the new habits of generosity which have been created, and the degree in which the Christian conscience has grown instructed as to the use of money, let him imagine what sort of response such an appeal, from such lips, would evoke to-day.

Nothing is more striking in all Wesley's instructions and appeals to his converts than the masterful note which runs through them. The accent of authority is always clear and high, and it is one more illustration of the fact that Methodism was in no sense, and at no stage of its history, a democracy. The crowd did not evolve Wesley and confer power upon him. He was never a demagogue, ruling the multitude by flattering it. From the very first, by the compulsion of events, and perhaps by natural temper and genius, Wesley was an autocrat. There were, of course, mixed elements in his character. He could be as docile as a child to any authority which

[1] Tyerman, p. 613.

had moral force behind it. But command was natural and easy for him. He was by necessity—and necessity in such a realm is only another word for divine purpose—the personal centre of the whole movement. And authority was for him inevitable.

Southey, who profoundly misreads Wesley's character, says that "the love of power was the ruling passion in his mind." Against Southey, however, may be set the judgment of a much keener mind than his, that of Miss Wedgwood. She expends pages to show that "supreme position was never an object of ambition to Wesley." Wesley himself affirms this again and again, with a transparent sincerity which is irresistible:—

"'The power I have,' he says, 'I never sought; it was the undesired, unexpected result of the work God was pleased to work by me. I have a thousand times sought to devolve it on others; but as yet I cannot; I therefore suffer it till I can find any to ease me of my burden.'"[1]

Facts amply justify that bit of self-description. It needs only a glance, indeed, at Wesley's career to see that, so far from thrusting himself into the foremost place on every occasion, and assuming the accents of a leader, he may often be accused, with reason, of hanging back too long, and of failing in initiative. Charles Wesley, and not his older and more masterful brother, formed the Holy Club at Oxford, and first won the sneering title of "Methodist." Morgan, in that society, and not Wesley, began philanthropic work. Whitefield, and not Wesley, was the first field-preacher. Wesley went to America because Oglethorpe persuaded him. He left America because his flock had revolted from him. He started the society at James Hutton's house under Böhler's advice. He always, in a word, needed some external impulse before he moved.

That he had no ambition to be the founder of a new Church is proved by the whole story of his work. He strained the loyalty of his people to breaking point in the effort to keep Methodism, as an organisation and a leaven, within the Anglican Church. But power was thrust upon him by the mere course of events; and he had enough of

[1] Southey, vol. ii. p. 70.

the temper of a born leader of men not to fling off the burden of inevitable authority, when it was necessary to the effectiveness of his work, and to the security of its results. He describes, with a frankness so courageous that it is nothing less than amusing, the origin of his own authority. The people, he declares, sought him out, not he them. And Wesley proceeds to trace this relation of dependence on their side, and of authority on his, right through the whole gamut of his workers.

This was the case with his societies:—

"The desire was on their part, not on mine; my desire was to live and die in retirement; but I did not see that I could refuse them my help and be guiltless before God. Here commenced my power; namely, a power to appoint, when, where, and how they should meet; and to remove those whose life showed that they had no desire to flee from the wrath to come. And this power remained the same, whether people meeting together number twelve, twelve hundred, or twelve thousand."

This was repeated in the case of the stewards: "Let it be remarked, it was I myself, not the people, who chose the stewards, and appointed to each the distinct work wherein he was to help me as long as I chose." The preachers, again, with their range of work and of gifts, stood in the same relation of dependence on Wesley:—

"Observe these likewise desired me, not I them. And here commenced my power to appoint each of these, when, where, and how to labour; that is, while he chose to continue with me; for each had a power to go away when he pleased, as I had also to go away from them, or any of them, if I saw sufficient cause. The case continued the same when the number of preachers increased. I had just the same power still to appoint when, where, and how each should help me; and to tell any, if I saw cause, 'I do not desire your help any longer.' On these terms, and no other, we joined at first; on these we continue joined."[1]

The Conference became in due course the centre of authority for Methodism. But Wesley proceeds to show with the utmost plainness that he was absolute in the

[1] Southey, vol. ii. p. 71.

Conference; it was his creation, the reflex of his will, the servant of his plans:—

"Observe; I myself sent for these, of my own free choice; and I sent for them to advise, not to govern me. Neither did I, at any of those times, divest myself of any part of that power which the providence of God had cast upon me, without any design or choice of mine. What is that power? It is a power of admitting into, and excluding from, the societies under my care; of choosing and removing stewards; of receiving or not receiving helpers; of appointing them when, where, and how to help me; and of desiring them to meet me when I see good. And as it was merely in obedience to the providence of God, and for the good of the people, that I at first accepted this power, which I never sought—nay, a hundred times laboured to throw off—so it is on the same considerations, not for profit, honour, or pleasure, that I use it at this day."

Wesley recites all this not in the least with the accents of an autocrat, jealous of his right to rule, but of a witness explaining facts.

His power, of course, was not like that of Ignatius Loyola, the authority of a despot over a celibate Order, an Order composed of men taught to think freedom a sin, and bondage a piety. Wesley's assistants and helpers came of the sturdy British stock. They were men nursed in freedom, with all natural ties about them. And Wesley's power was not that of a lord over serfs, but of a father among his children. They were his spiritual offspring. His training and intellect, his natural gifts and range of knowledge, strengthened all his spiritual claims to authority. And it may be added that the course of history steadily and curiously multiplied his power.

For thirty years before his death Wesley stood as lonely as an Alpine peak. He was not merely without rivals, but almost without comrades; and he had no visible successor. Everything centred in him and depended on him. His assistants were but his spiritual children. It is difficult to find in history a parallel to the exact type of authority which, during the later years of his career at least, hung on Wesley's lips and was carried on the tip of his pen. And the stamp of that masterful will is on his church at a hundred points to-day.

# CHAPTER VIII

## A THREATENED SCHISM

Whitefield died at Newburyport, in the United States, on September 30, 1770, and his death had some dramatic features which made it a fitting close to a great career. He had just finished a week of open-air services, marked by extraordinary power, at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, On his way home he addressed a vast assembly in the fields near Exeter. It was, though he knew it not, his last service, to use his own grandiose words, with "the sky for sounding-board"; and he was so carried away by a passion of emotion that he preached with unexhausted energy for two hours! Thirty-one years before, at Kingswood, he had first broken through all ecclesiastical conventions and preached in the open-air to the miners there, and his last open-air sermon was as mighty as his first.

On the evening of the same day, as the darkness fell, the crowd gathered round the house where Whitefield was staying. They pressed their way in and thronged the hall, eager to catch some more words from lips so eloquent. Whitefield was at supper; he was exhausted with fatigue, and broken with what, though he knew it not, was a mortal sickness, and he told a clergyman who was with him to address the people. "I cannot say a word," he explained, and taking a candle he hastened to his room.

At the head of the stairs he stopped, and looked down on the faces upturned to him in the hall beneath. The appeal of those silent, eager countenances was irresistible, and with the lifted candle in his right hand Whitefield began to speak. The trembling, musical voice flowed on, the rush of words and thoughts never ceased till the candle held in the preacher's hand burned away and, with a flash, expired. Whitefield, though nobody sus-

pected it, was a dying man; the quenched flame of the candle was a parable.

Years before, looking forward with a gleam of prophet-like vision to his own dying hour, Whitefield had said, "I shall die silent. It has pleased God to enable me to bear so many testimonies for Him during my life that He will require none from me when I die." And this was literally true. He slept that night till two o'clock, then awoke; an attack of asthma had seized him. He knew his end was come. Breath failed him. He fell on his knees, with choking respiration tried to pray, and died in the effort. His head was bowed, his hands stretched out in supplication, when the last breath fluttered over his lips.

The sober, practical British mind is apt to disparage mere gifts of speech, and to deny the title of greatness to any one who is nothing more than an orator. Whitefield, it is true, built no Church, and, in a sense, left no followers. He certainly added no new province to the realm of human knowledge, and he shaped no new channel in which the great forces of religion might permanently flow. But his greatness cannot be denied. For over thirty years he swayed vaster crowds by his preaching than any other orator known to the history of religion; and the mere estimate that he preached 18,000 sermons —an average, say, of more than ten a week—for the whole of his public ministry, gives a quite inadequate measure of his work. The scale of his audiences, the passion and length of his sermons—to say nothing of the crowded tasks which filled up the brief intervals betwixt his discourses—all have to be considered.

And Whitefield's natural gifts — the deep, melodious voice, the rush of moving words, the dramatic gestures which great actors envied, the power, which is the supreme gift of oratory, of making vast audiences thrill with the exact emotions of the speaker's own soul—all these in him were but the servants and instruments of still mightier forces, forces which stream out of the spiritual realm and shape the human soul itself to a new pattern.

It is sometimes forgotten that Whitefield did in America an almost greater work than that he accomplished in England. On the other side of the Atlantic he was, in a sense, the spiritual heir of Jonathan Edwards. What

is known in the religious history of the United States as "the Great Awakening" had almost passed away when Whitefield stepped upon American soil; but his preaching renewed on a new scale that memorable work. He gave it a wider range and a nobler character than it had reached under Jonathan Edwards. Whitefield, in America no more than in England, built a Church which bears his name; but the religious life of neither England nor America would be quite the same to-day if George Whitefield, the servitor of the inn at Gloucester, the "poor scholar" of Pembroke College, the open-air preacher of the eighteenth century, had never lived.

Over Whitefield's ashes the fire of the great Calvinistic controversy was re-kindled, and burned more fiercely than even at first; perhaps for the reason that this time there was a woman in it! A woman, when she becomes a theologian, takes her theology, if not more earnestly, yet more vehemently, not to say shrewishly, than does a theologian of the opposite sex. She follows her logic more relentlessly to its uttermost conclusion; she is more fiercely jealous for the honour and the influence of her creed. And at this stage a woman was doing, in the Calvinistic branch of the Methodist revival, what Whitefield had refused to do, and knew, indeed, he could not do. "I should weave a Penelope's web," he said, "if I formed societies." He had no organising gift; and without organisation there is no permanent work. But Lady Huntingdon was doing that very work, and doing it with signal energy and success.

She was a remarkable woman; had she belonged to the Church of Rome, as Macaulay says, she would have been adorned with the nimbus of a saint. She was the daughter of Earl Ferrers, the widow of the Earl of Huntingdon, and her rank and wealth enabled her to do for the Revival what no other person could have done. She opened new worlds to it. She gave it social prestige. She sheltered it from persecution. She invited Whitefield to her house, appointed him one of her chaplains, and gathered fashionable audiences under her own roof to listen to him. Chesterfield and Bolingbroke came, amongst others, to hear the famous preacher. Chesterfield listened with smiling courtesy, as unmoved as

though he were listening to the twittering of a bird; but Bolingbroke—the rake, the wit, the friend of Voltaire, the politician who served all parties and was loyal to none—was strangely moved by Whitefield's preaching. He invited Whitefield to visit him, and sought religious discourse with him. It may be suspected that he was simply in search of the flavours of a new excitement.

Lady Huntingdon surrendered herself fully to the ardours and ideals of the great religious movement in progress. She built chapels that bore her name in various parts of England, and by appointing the preachers as her chaplains escaped the difficulty that so much perplexed Wesley, who would not label himself and his preachers "dissenters," and so secure the shelter of the Toleration Act, and yet found the doors of the Anglican churches shut against both him and them. Lady Huntingdon set up a great seminary for her chaplains at Trevecca, in Wales. Benson, one of Wesley's helpers, was classical tutor in the college; the saintly Fletcher, for a time Wesley's designated successor, was its principal.

Lady Huntingdon herself was a Calvinist of more resolute type than even Whitefield. Buckle, in his "History of Civilisation," says that Calvinism is a creed which has a democratic stamp, while Arminianism is aristocratic in its genius; but that generalisation inverts the truth. Calvinism, which creates a spiritual aristocracy of the elect, and limits God's mercy to them, easily commends itself to an aristocratic mind like that of Lady Huntingdon. Southey is shrewd enough to see this. "She was," he says, "predisposed unconsciously to favour a doctrine which makes a privileged order of souls." Wesley and Whitefield, living under the empire of great motives, and dealing with great affairs, were reluctant to be entangled in controversy. In his societies Wesley, as a settled policy, made no difference betwixt Calvinist and Arminian. The two great comrades recorded in a formal document their resolve, for the sake of peace, "to avoid preaching on Calvinistic topics to the utmost extent possible." Charles Wesley—often shrewder than his brother—afterwards wrote on the document the words "vain agreement"! Controversy, betwixt even such men, when parted at one point by a theological gulf so

profound, was inevitable. Yet the controversy betwixt them, described in a previous chapter, had run its course, and practically died away when an unhappy incident revived it.

Wesley laboured perpetually to keep the theology of the Revival in a state of what may be called sane equipoise. It tended to run to extremes, and it is easy to understand that tendency. Theology was no longer the luxury of scholars; it was the daily bread of the common people. Or, to vary the figure, theology had stepped out of the drowsy atmosphere of the Universities and of the Churches, and was walking on common earth amongst the crowds. That it sometimes lost its feet, or ran the risk of falling into the ditch on one side or the other, need excite no wonder. That is the perpetual danger of a religious movement which powerfully affects great multitudes.

What may be called the re-discovered doctrine of entire sanctification or "perfection," for example, lent itself easily to exaggeration. It not seldom came into quarrel with rudimentary morality. It lapsed into Antinomianism, and there were shocking examples of this peril amongst Wesley's own helpers.

In the Conference of 1771 Wesley set himself to correct this evil. He recited instances "in which," to use his own words, "we have leaned too much towards Calvinism," especially towards that aspect of Calvinism which denies, or seems to deny, to man himself any part in the business of his own salvation. That salvation could be by "works" had been denied with an emphasis which, in some eager ears, sounded like the assertion—the welcome assertion—that salvation and works are in eternal quarrel with each other! To rebuke this madness the Conference passed certain resolutions:—

"We have received it as a maxim that 'a man is to do nothing in order to justification.' Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favour with God should 'cease from evil, and learn to do well.' Whoever repents should do 'works meet for repentance.' And if this is not in order to find favour, what does he do them for?

"Is not this 'salvation by works'? Not by the merit of works, but by works as a condition.

"What have we been disputing about for these thirty years? I am afraid about words.

"As to merit itself, of which we have been so dreadfully afraid, we are rewarded 'according to our works,' yea 'because of our works.' How does this differ from for the sake of our works? And how differs this from *secundum merita operum*, as our works deserve? Can you split this hair? I doubt I cannot."[1]

These propositions, looked at with modern eyes, are offenceless; but to Lady Huntingdon and the jealous Calvinists about her, they seemed hardly less than blasphemous. They were the very negation of the Gospel! Wesley and all associated with him became vehemently suspect. They were betraying evangelical doctrine! Lady Huntingdon resolved to cleanse Trevecca, her training college, from the evil taint. Everybody in the college who would not renounce the resolutions of the Conference must be dismissed. The resolutions were employed as a test; every student and master was required to write his verdict upon them, and to disavow them on penalty of expulsion. Benson, the classical master, was in this way compelled to resign his post.

Fletcher was the head of the college, a man whose saintliness, wedded to great intellectual gifts, moves even Southey to almost rapturous admiration: "A man of rare talents," he says, "and rarer virtue. No age or country has ever produced a man of more fervent piety, or more perfect charity; no Church has ever possessed a more apostolic minister." But since Fletcher could only hold his post at Trevecca at the price of disavowing Wesley, he resigned his office there. "If every Arminian," he said, "must quit the college, I am discharged for one, for I cannot give up the possibility of salvation of all, any more than I can give up the truth and love of God."

Wesley himself wrote to Lady Huntingdon disavowing the evil meaning which had been read into the resolutions. He concluded :—

"To be short. Such as I am, I love you well. You have one of the first places in my esteem and affection, and you once had

[1] Tyerman, iii. p. 73.

some regard for me. But it cannot continue if it depends upon my seeing with your eyes. My dear friend, you seem not to have well learned yet the meaning of those words which I desire to have continually written upon my heart, 'Whosoever doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." [1]

But when did soft words soothe ruffled theologians? The angry Calvinists were not in the least satisfied; and not content with purging their own stronghold, they determined to carry the war into the enemy's country. They would attend the next Methodist Conference in a body and correct Wesley's deplorable theology in the presence of his own helpers! A circular letter was issued, signed by Shirley, one of Lady Huntingdon's chaplains, and addressed to everybody of influence in connection with the Revival known to hold Calvinistic views. The Conference was to be held at Bristol, and the circular explained that "Lady Huntingdon and many other Christian friends, real Protestants," intended to hold a meeting at Bristol at the same time:—

"It is further proposed that they go in a body to the said Conference and insist upon a formal recantation of the said minutes, and in case of a refusal that they sign and publish their protest against them. It is submitted to you whether it would not be right, in the opposition to be made to such dreadful heresy, to recommend it to as many of your Christian friends, as well of the Dissenters as of the Established Church, as you can prevail on to be there, the cause being of so public a nature." [2]

Now, to insist upon Wesley, in the presence of his own Conference, making a formal recantation of truths which, only a year before, both he and the Conference had so solemnly affirmed, was a very daring undertaking. It illustrates, not so much the courage of Mr. Shirley and the whole corps of Lady Huntingdon's chaplains, as their temporary loss of sanity. Wesley went on his busy way in his usual cool fashion, but he issued a brief exposition of the resolutions passed by the Conference of 1770, and wrote with his own hands, on the copy, "If the Calvinists do not, or will not, understand me, I understand myself,

[1] Tyerman, iii. p. 93. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

and I do not contradict anything I have written these thirty years."

The recantation began, as a matter of fact, on Lady Huntingdon's side. Time and reflection had cooled her vehemence. She wrote to Wesley the night before the Conference assembled, acknowledging that the circular letter was too hastily drawn up. Shirley, whose courage, too, had begun to evaporate, wrote, apologising for the offensive phraseology to be found in it. Not twenty persons answered to the call of the letter. The gentlemen who came to correct his theology were received by Wesley in the Conference with exquisite courtesy and good temper. He hated controversy, and was willing to sacrifice everything, except truth, to escape from it. Fifty-three of his preachers signed a statement which Shirley himself, at Wesley's half-ironical request, prepared:—

"We hereby solemnly declare, in the sight of God, that we have no trust or confidence but in the alone merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for justification or salvation either in life, death, or the day of judgment; and though no one is a real Christian believer (and consequently cannot be saved) who doth not good works, where there is time and opportunity, yet our works have no part in meriting or purchasing our salvation from first to last, either in whole or in part."

Shirley, on his part, signed a public acknowledgment that he had mistaken the meaning of the resolutions. But, unhappily, the controversy was not ended. It was only transferred into the realm of literature. Fletcher had written a vindication of the assailed minutes, a very noble bit of writing, and including in it a fine appeal for brotherly loyalty to each other:—

"Of the two greatest and most useful ministers I ever knew (he wrote) one is no more. The other, after amazing labours, flies still, with unwearied diligence, through the three kingdoms, calling sinners to repentance. Though oppressed with the weight of nearly seventy years, and the cares of nearly thirty thousand souls, he shames still, by his unabated zeal and immense labours, all the young ministers in England, perhaps in Christendom. He has generally blown the Gospel trumpet, and rode twenty miles, before most of the professors, who despise his labours, have left their downy pillows. As he begins the day, the week, the year,

so he concludes them, still intent upon extensive services for the glory of the Redeemer and the good of souls. And shall we lightly lift our pens, our tongues, our hands against him? No; let them rather forget their cunning. If we will quarrel, can we find nobody to fall out with but the minister upon whom God puts the greatest honour?"

Shirley replied to Fletcher, who, on his part, published five letters to Shirley, the first of his famous "Checks to Antinomianism." Then followed the most lively and exasperated tempest of theological controversy that ever broke on English literature. The principal writers on the Calvinistic side were Richard and Rowland Hill, Berridge, of Everton, and Toplady, who has been made immortal by his one matchless hymn, "Rock of Ages." Wesley took little personal part in the controversy. One brief and deadly contribution which he made, it is true, kindled much anger. Toplady had published a "Treatise upon Absolute Predestination." Wesley published a short analysis of this treatise, with the following summary:—

"The sum of all this: One in twenty (suppose) of mankind are elected; nineteen in twenty are reprobated. The elect shall be saved, do what they will; the reprobate shall be damned, do what they can. Reader, believe this, or be damned. Witness my hand.—A. T."

To see his theology condensed into a space so narrow, and transformed into a concrete form so dreadful and endorsed with his own initials, filled Toplady with an anger almost too deep for words, and that anger explains the shrill tones in which he scolded at large.

The fight was carried on from the Arminian side not only by Fletcher of Madeley, but by Thomas Olivers, one of Wesley's helpers, who had been a cobbler, and like Toplady was a hymnist. His well-known verses, "The God of Abraham praise," strike a loftier and more sustained—if less tender—note than even Toplady's deathless hymn. Fletcher, alone amongst these angry divines, wrote with the temper of a saint and the manners of a gentleman; while he knew how to use a keenness of logic which recalls Pascal's "Provincial Letters." The other controversialists pursued each other with injurious epithets

through countless reams of literature; and Toplady, sad to relate, had the most bitter tongue of all these shrewish theologians. "An Old Fox Tarred and Feathered," is the title of one of his pamphlets on Wesley. Even for the gentle-spirited and saintly Fletcher Toplady employed no other weapon than a cudgel: "In the very few pages of Fletcher's letters which he had perused," he said, "the serious passages were dulness double-condensed and the lighter passages impudence double-distilled!"

The controversy is long dead; but the temper in which it was conducted is an enduring scandal to religion. What can be more amazing than the spectacle of two deeply religious men, one of whom had written "Rock of Ages," a hymn which the Church of Christ will sing till earthly hymns are no longer needed; and the other had written one of the greatest of sacred lyrics—"The God of Abraham praise"—abusing each other with the temper and language of angry fishwives!

But it is pleasant to remember that this gust of theological passion quickly passed away. Fletcher, always the saint and the gentleman, was practically a dying man. He was about to leave England and try the effect of breathing once more his native air in Switzerland; and before he left he invited all the divines with whom he had been in controversy to meet him, that, "all doctrinal differences apart, he might testify his sincere regret for having given them the least displeasure, and receive from them some condescending assurance of reconciliation and goodwill."

Nearly all the combatants in turn exhibited, in the later stages of the controversy, a more Christian temper. Rowland Hill suppressed one of his bitter pamphlets, in order, as he said, "to prevent the evil that might arise from my wrong touches upon the work of God." Berridge received Fletcher at his parsonage, and as he crossed his threshold rushed to him with open arms and tear-wet cheeks. "How," he cried, "could we write so about each other, when we each aimed at the same thing, the glory of God and the good of souls?" Toplady, almost alone, remained implacable.

Stevens, in his unwieldy but very able "History of Methodism," says that the effect of this controversy was "to

give a permanent character to the theology of Methodism; a resurrection to the faith which the Synod of Dort had proscribed; greater prominence to the doctrines of Arminius and Grotius than all their continental champions had secured for them; to spread evangelical Arminianism over England, over all the Protestant portion of the New World, and more or less around the whole world; to modify the theological tone of evangelical Christendom, and probably of all coming time."

This is a wild over-statement. The Calvinistic dispute of 1770 and the following years is but one of the outer and remote vibrations of the earlier controversy betwixt Wesley and Whitefield thirty years before. The whole controversy was, no doubt, of importance as making definite and articulate the doctrine of Methodism on one particular and much-vexed point. But the earlier stage of the controversy was the more important. It was a conflict betwixt the two great leaders of the Revival. The controversy betwixt them moved at a high level, and occurring at a moment when the theology of Methodism was yet in the plastic stage, it did, in fact, determine that theology for all time. The controversy of 1770 and the following years was a battle betwixt smaller men. Its single permanent contribution to theological literature is found in Fletcher's famous "Checks." And Fletcher not only made the richest intellectual contribution to the controversy, he kindled in its smoke and dust the one clear flame of Christian spirit yet discoverable in it.

It may be added that, later, Lady Huntingdon herself shared Wesley's fate. Her societies were driven from the place in the Anglican Church in which she had so long held them. The last thing she contemplated was turning the places of worship she built into dissenting chapels. She appointed the preachers her personal chaplains; this was supposed to be legally within her right as a peeress of the realm, and the device was understood to release both chapels and ministers from the Toleration Act. But in 1779 she purchased a great building called the Pantheon in the north of London, and made it the centre of a mission. The clergyman within whose parish the building stood claimed control over it, and as the result of a costly lawsuit Lady Huntingdon's chaplains were pro-

hibited from officiating in the new chapel; and the decision was found to apply to all her chapels. Lady Huntingdon found herself in cruel straits. She must close her chapels or label them dissenting places of worship. "I am compelled," she wrote, "to turn the finest congregation, not only in England, but in any part of the world, into a dissenting meeting-house! I am to be cast out of the Church now, only for what I have been doing these forty years—speaking and living for Jesus Christ."

Her chaplains were shut up to the same cruel choice, and, as a result, the Calvinistic branch shared the fate of the Arminian division of the Revival. It was driven to undertake a separate existence. And so "Lady Huntingdon's Connexion" came into existence, and still survives, and the Anglican Church once more justified its title of "the Church of missed opportunities."

Lady Huntingdon had to follow Wesley's example at another point. Her preachers could no longer obtain ordination from the bishops. The sacraments, as a result, could not be administered; so her chaplains had themselves to ordain their own successors, and ordination, to quote Lord Mansfield, once more proved to be separation.

Lady Huntingdon herself died in 1791, the same year as Wesley. She was eighty-four years of age. Her sickness was of a peculiarly cruel and wasting character, but her death was the fitting crown of a saintly life. A blood-vessel broke just before she died, and, with her lips still wet with the crimson stain, she whispered, "I am well! All is well, well for ever. I see nothing but victory. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh, the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." Then, with the gesture of a tired child, she lifted her hands and said, "I long to be at home; oh, I long to be at home."

A little before she died she said—repeating the words over and over again—"I shall go to my Father this night;" and shortly after, "Can He forget to be gracious? Is there any end of His loving kindness?" Almost her last words were: "My work is done; I have nothing to do but to go to my Father."

# CHAPTER IX

## THE DEED OF DECLARATION

The failure of the attempt in 1764 to secure the continued help of at least the evangelical clergy in the Anglican Church profoundly affected the future development of Methodism. Wesley read a paper to the Conference in 1769 in which he tells the tale of his appeal to the clergy, and of its failure. "Out of fifty or sixty," he said, "to whom I wrote, only three vouchsafed me an answer, so I gave this up. I can do no more. They are a rope of sand, and such they will continue." The only response Wesley received at that time was in the shape of a request to put his societies in each parish under the control of the local clergyman, and to refrain from sending his helpers to any place "where there was a godly minister." This was a proposal to commit spiritual suicide.

Wesley just at that moment was realising his loneliness. His early comrades were no longer at his side. Whitefield was simply a wandering evangelist, absorbed in his American work. He had no ordered plans of his own, and could take no part in the ordered plans of any one else. Moreover, he was parted from Wesley by an enduring and fatal divergence in doctrine. Wesley had to count him out as a permanent force in the Revival. Charles Wesley had practically ceased to be an itinerant, and the brothers were diverging ecclesiastically. For Charles Wesley the "Church" was more and more outbulking the Revival; while John Wesley, though still refusing to take a single uncompelled step towards separation, yet saw clearly that separation was inevitable. The Church of England no longer supplied him with helpers, and, it was clear, had no friendly intentions towards his societies.

He was himself now approaching seventy years of age. The end of his earthly labours was within measurable dis-

tance. He was not an imaginative man. He took short views. He saw clearly the things immediately round him, but had no vision for the landscape. But there had come to him at last a sense of the greatness and continuity of his work. It would outlive him. It had grown beyond his dreams, and would still grow. And he had somehow to ensure to it order, discipline, leadership, purity of doctrine, and continuity of method, after his death. He must crystallise into organic shape the tangled agencies and forces which made up the Methodism of that day. An individual dies, but an institution wisely planned is deathless. It was for Methodism, at this stage, an imperative necessity to take some definite and enduring legal form.

Wesley turned for the moment to his own Conference, and to the great order of travelling preachers. They were men of proved spiritual gifts, of heroic zeal. They were faithful to the message they carried, and loyal to Wesley himself. They were no rope of sand! So he tells them: "You are at present one body. You act in concert with each other, and by united counsels. And now is the time to consider what can be done in order to continue this union."

While Wesley himself lived, he was a sufficient centre of union. All loyalty centred in him. His brain planned, his will decided, everything. His helpers were related to each other because they were all related to him. But he was not immortal. He must die soon, and might die at any moment. What substitute could be found for his personal influence? Where could a basis of union be discovered which did not rest on a single frail and dying life?

It was clear that the first condition of a union, which time could not destroy, nor shock of circumstance wreck, was loyalty to a common spiritual ideal, and this, no doubt, existed. "I take it for granted," Wesley wrote, "union cannot be preserved by any means between those who have not a single eye. Those who aim at anything but the glory of God, and the salvation of men; who desire, or seek, any earthly thing, whether honour, profit, or ease, will not, cannot continue in the Connexion; it will not answer their design. Some, perhaps, will pro-

cure preferment in the Church. Others will turn Independents, and get separate congregations, like John Edwards and Charles Skelton. Lay your account for this, and be not surprised if some you do not suspect be of this number."

But some practical means must be devised for giving effect to the spiritual unity which existed; and some policy must be agreed upon in advance, as a preparation for Wesley's death. Wesley suggests a plan:—

"On notice of my death, let all the preachers in England and Ireland repair to London within six weeks. Let them seek God by solemn fasting and prayer. Let them draw up articles of agreement, to be signed by those who choose to act in concert. Let those be dismissed who do not choose it, in the most friendly manner possible. Let the remainder choose, by votes, a committee of three, five, or seven, each of whom is to be Moderator in his turn. Let the committee do what I do now: propose preachers to be tried, admitted, or excluded. Fix the places of each preacher for the ensuing year, and the time of the next Conference."[1]

This, of course, was government of what may be called the Venetian type; government by a committee, certain to become a clique. It could never have supplied the basis of a great and free Church. The place of the "committee of three, five, or seven" was taken later by the Legal Hundred: and even this device would have been too fatally rigid but for the generous interpretation given to it.

Wesley later called upon his helpers to sign a solemn "Covenant of Agreement." It ran as follows:—

"We, whose names are underwritten, being thoroughly convinced of the necessity of a close union between those whom God is pleased to use as instruments in this glorious work, in order to preserve this union between ourselves, are resolved, God being our helper, (1) to devote ourselves entirely to God, denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily; steadily aiming at one thing, to save our own souls, and them that hear us; (2) to preach the old Methodist doctrines, and no other, contained in the Minutes of the Conference; (3) to observe and enforce the whole Methodist discipline, laid down in the Minutes."[2]

[1] Myles, p. 129. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Wesley was never in a hurry; and with the wise instinct of a great leader he was content to wait until the slower minds of his followers came into perfect harmony with his own. These articles of agreement were, accordingly, brought before each of the three succeeding Conferences, and all the preachers attending them, numbering one hundred and one, signed it. Here, at last, then, was formulated a policy and a bond which provided for the organic survival of Methodism beyond its founder's death. Fortunately this scheme was never put to the test of actual practice.

Now Wesley's government was of necessity personal. He was a spiritual autocrat, though without the despotic temper or methods of an autocracy. And not content with binding his helpers together by a formal agreement, which was to run beyond his own life, he looked round him for a personal successor. The wisdom of that search may well be doubted. There could be no second Wesley. Even if a leader were discovered equal to Wesley in intellectual gifts, these would not give him Wesley's place, or Wesley's authority. That authority was a product of history. It was born, not of Wesley's personal endowments, but of events, and of his personal relations to his helpers. They were his spiritual children, and his power over them was the untransferable authority of a father.

Wesley, however, in search of a helper, turned to Fletcher. In a letter to him, dated June 1773, he tells him, "I see more and more unless there be one leader, the work can never be carried on. The body of the preachers are not united, nor will any part of them submit to the rest. Either there must be one to preside over all, or the work will indeed come to an end." And this, it must be noted, is after the "articles of agreement" had been drawn up and signed! There was much of unregenerate human nature still surviving, even in this order of saintly men!

Wesley proceeds to describe, with almost amusing detail, the sort of man his successor must be:—

"He must be a man of faith and love, and one that has a single eye to the advancement of the kingdom of God. He must have a clear understanding; a knowledge of men and things, particularly

of the Methodist doctrine and discipline; a ready utterance; diligence and activity, with a tolerable share of health. There must be added to these, favour with the people, with the Methodists in general. For, unless God turn their eyes and their hearts towards him, he will be quite incapable of the work. He must likewise have some degree of learning; because there are many adversaries, learned as well as unlearned, whose mouths must be stopped. But this cannot be done unless he be able to meet them on their own ground."[1]

Then, writing to Fletcher, Wesley goes on to ask, "Has God provided one so qualified? Who is he? THOU ART THE MAN!" he cries. He calls upon Fletcher, "without conferring with flesh and blood," to "come and strengthen the hands, comfort the heart, and share the labour of your affectionate friend and brother."

Wesley held Fletcher in an esteem which at this distance of time seems extravagant. He compares him with Whitefield—to Whitefield's disadvantage: "He was full as much called to sound an alarm through all the nation as Mr. Whitefield himself; nay, he was far better qualified for that important work. He had a far more striking person; equal good breeding; an equally winning address; together with a richer flow of fancy; a stronger understanding; a far greater treasure of learning, both in language, philosophy, philology, and divinity; and above all, a more deep and constant communion with the Father, and with the Son Jesus Christ."[2]

Fletcher's fragile body, of course, could not have sustained for a single week the strain of labour under which Whitefield lived for nearly forty years; nor could he sway crowds in Whitefield's overwhelming fashion. But Fletcher's charm for Wesley is perfectly intelligible. He had spiritual gifts which Wesley himself lacked—a glow of rapture, and of adoration, a constantly burning fire of spiritual emotion, to which Wesley could never pretend. Wesley describes in more than one well-known passage his own sober-coloured and permanent spiritual mood. To a man of his temperament Fletcher's ardours had the office of a cheerful and ever-burning fire. He brought with him the glow of a spiritual summer. Fletcher, too,

[1] Smith, p. 456. [2] Tyerman, iii. p. 150.

reinforced the spiritual side of Wesley's character by that strange atmosphere, as from other worlds, which attended him. A description survives of a memorable visit Fletcher paid to one of the Conferences, which illustrates, if it does not explain, the strange spiritual influence which seemed to radiate from him. Fletcher, emaciated, feeble and ghostlike, entered the Conference leaning on the arm of his host, Mr. Ireland.

"In an instant the whole assembly stood up, and Wesley advanced to meet his almost seraphic friend. The apparently dying man began to address the brave itinerants, and, before he had uttered a dozen sentences, one and all were bathed in tears. Wesley, fearing that Fletcher was speaking too much, abruptly knelt at his side and began to pray. Down fell the whole of Wesley's preachers, and joined in the devotion of their great leader."[1]

It is hardly to be wondered at that Wesley wanted the permanent companionship of a soul like that of Fletcher, and looked on Fletcher as the fittest man to be his successor. Fletcher's easily alarmed modesty, indeed, might well have made him recoil from any pretence of possessing that splendid catalogue of gifts and graces which Wesley declared to be necessary for his successor. But another set of virtues—his loyalty to any call of duty, his habit of intellectual obedience to Wesley—made him listen assentingly to his great leader's call. His reply ran: "Should Providence call you first, I shall do my best, with the Lord's assistance, to help your brother to cover up the wreck and keep together those who are not absolutely bent to throw away the Methodist doctrine and discipline."

But these words hardly meant all they seemed to express. Fletcher was willing to be a travelling assistant to Wesley, but as he reflected on the task of becoming his ecclesiastical heir, his modest nature took alarm. On June 9, 1776, he writes to Wesley telling him that "Your recommending me to the societies as one who might succeed you is a step to which I can by no means consent. It would make me take my horse and gallop away."

Fletcher was not to be Wesley's successor. He married

[1] Tyerman, iii. 247.

Miss Bosanquet on November 12, 1781, and marriage with him, as with Charles Wesley, was fatal to any wide flight of labours as an evangelist. The taint of consumption, moreover, was in his blood, and he died only four years afterwards.

But just when Fletcher's failing health and invincible shrinking from a task so great made it clear he could be neither Wesley's assistant nor his successor, Providence raised up a helper who, for the remainder of Wesley's life, was to share with him the great task of administering the discipline and shaping the policy of Methodism.

In 1776 Wesley, while conducting a series of meetings in the West, met with Dr. Coke, who had just been dismissed from his curacy for employing in it many of Wesley's own methods. Coke was of an ardent and generous temperament, with something more than a touch of natural genius. He was a Welshman, short-necked, short-bodied, big-brained; a gentleman, a scholar, and a man of means. He had a personal fortune of £1200 a year. He was twice married, and each wife brought him a fortune. At his ordination he was an arid High Churchman, who would not allow a Dissenter to defile his threshold by crossing it. But a brother clergyman lent him Wesley's Sermons and Journals, and they deeply stirred him. They were a revelation of possibilities in religion hitherto not only unattained, but even unguessed. Coke, in a state of spiritual disquiet, came to London. He fell under Maxfield's influence, and was sufficiently broken in pride to learn of a godly layman the secret of faith in Christ. He had all the fire and glow natural to the Welsh genius, and religion for him became at once an ardent spiritual flame—a rebuke to all colder spirits. He went back to his Somersetshire parish, and toiled in it with an impetuous zeal too great for his astonished parishioners. They ended by drowning his voice in his own parish church with the help of the church bells. He was presently dismissed from his curacy. Shortly after he met Wesley. "I had much conversation with him," records Wesley, "and a union then began which I trust shall never end."

Coke was admirably fitted to be Wesley's *alter ego*. Like him, he was a University man, with the habits of a scholar and the refinements of a gentleman. Like him,

too, he was a tireless evangelist, and was capable of a sustained energy of labour which approached, if it did not rival, that of Wesley himself. And there is something almost dramatically opportune in the appearance of Coke. He was not only the exact man wanted, but he appeared at exactly the right moment. Many of the great problems of Methodism were already solved. It had found, and formulated, its theology. After 1771 the Minutes of the Conference record no excursion into doctrine of any sort. Its ecclesiastical forms and policy, too, had already been shaped by force of circumstances. It possessed an unsurpassed hymnology. But the question had yet to be solved whether Methodism should be provincial or imperial, limited to a group of islands or a force touching all lands. It was at the moment visibly in peril of becoming parochial. Wesley was so absorbed in the three kingdoms that he had practically no vision for what lay beyond them.

But Coke had the qualities which Wesley lacked. He was Wesley's complement. He was not simply an ardent evangelist, a great administrator, with a genius for managing men; he had what Wesley wanted—imagination. He saw earlier than Wesley himself, and with larger and surer vision, to what Methodism would grow. He saw more than the three kingdoms. He saw America, India, the West Indies. So he became what has been called "the foreign minister of Methodism." He founded its missions, and for years shaped their policy.

Wesley entrusted him with great responsibilities. He sent him, for example, in 1782, to Ireland to preside at the Conference there, and for years not Wesley, but Coke, presided in that Conference. Coke itinerated on an even larger field than Wesley. Wesley could not, or would not, visit America, but he sent Coke there again and again as his spokesman and representative; and he crossed the Atlantic, in those days of small ships and long voyages, no less than eighteen times, and all at his own expense. He was sent out to shape, with Asbury's companionship, the outlines of a church destined to outbulk in scale British Methodism itself.

But not even the great field of the United States was large enough for Coke's zeal. He planted missions in the West Indies, and before his death they numbered

15,000 members. He outlived Wesley by more than twenty years, and when an old man of sixty-five he appeared in the Wesleyan Conference and pleaded to be sent to India to found a mission there. There were no funds to start such a mission, but Coke found £6000 of his own for that purpose. He sailed with a small company of helpers, and died on the voyage. He was found dead in his cabin one morning, with a placid smile on his face. And, fitly enough, the body of that tireless and daring servant of Christ's Gospel found its resting-place in that "vast and wandering grave"—the sea.

Methodism is the product of many forces. Whitefield set it the example of an heroic aggressiveness, Fletcher coloured its theology, Charles Wesley taught it to sing, John Wesley was the central flame of its zeal, and the shaping brain of its ecclesiastical form. But Coke gave it geographical range. He forbade it to be insular.

In the meantime a great legal question, on which turned the future of Methodism, had to be settled. By 1784 there were 359 Methodist chapels in the United Kingdom. On what legal title was this great mass of property held; and what was Wesley's legal relation to their use? Wesley's plans seldom ran beyond the immediate thing in hand. When, in 1739, the first preaching-house at Bristol was erected, it was proposed to draw up the deed of trust "on the Presbyterian plan," giving the trustees, that is, the right of determining who should use the building. This, of course, involved the whole question of the appointment of ministers to the chapels; and Whitefield, more alert at this point than even his great comrade, wrote to Wesley telling him: "If the trustees are to name the preachers, they may even exclude you from the house you have built. Pray let the deed be immediately cancelled." This was done, and so a great blunder was escaped.

But Wesley had to adopt some general rule with regard to his chapels. A trust-deed was drawn up, providing that the trustees should permit Wesley himself, or such persons as he appointed, to have free use of these premises. Charles Wesley and William Grimshaw were, if they outlived Wesley, to have the same rights. After their death the chapels were to be held in trust for the sole use of

such preachers as might be appointed by "the yearly Conference of the people called Methodists."

This deed was supposed to be effective and final, but, as a matter of fact, it contained one fatal flaw. The "yearly Conference of the people called Methodists" had no legal existence or definition. It was not an entity that could sue or be sued. It was a fluctuating body, consisting of such preachers as Wesley himself chose each year to confer with him. "All this time," said Wesley, "it depended on me alone, not only what persons should constitute the Conference, but whether there should be any Conference at all. This lay wholly in my own breast; neither the preachers nor the people having any part or lot in the matter."

But a body of this vague and unsettled character, it is plain, was not a legal corporation. It was little better than a yearly accident. How could a quite undefined gathering of this kind exercise the tremendous power of determining, year by year, who should exercise pastoral authority, and discharge pastoral functions, in all the chapels of Methodism? It was essential not only to the peace but to the continued existence of Methodism that the Conference, the centre of all power, the supreme instrument of government, should be legally defined.

Many legal devices were suggested: the creation of a single board of trustees, in which all chapels might be vested; the collection of all trusts, deeds, in a single office, &c. But such plans did not provide for the supreme necessity of the case, the continuity and corporate existence of a living assembly. The Conference itself was wiser than Wesley in this matter, and urged him to have an instrument prepared, defining and erecting into a legal entity "the Conference of the people called Methodists." So far, it was little better than a phrase. An undying corporation must take its place.

Accordingly, on February 28, 1784, Wesley executed the legal document on which Methodism stands—the "Model Deed" or "Deed of Declaration." A hundred preachers, duly named, were declared to constitute the Conference. In this body was vested the power of the appointment of all ministers to their spheres of work which Wesley himself had hitherto exercised. The "Legal

Hundred," as it is called, has the power of filling its own ranks year by year. It is thus a continuous entity, and secures continuity of legal existence to the governing body of the Church. All chapels are held in trust for this corporation, and subject to its authority. Elsewhere than in Great Britain the various Methodist Conferences are constituted by Act of Parliament. But in Great Britain Wesley's Legal Hundred is still the instrument by which the Conference is kept in effective existence.

The Deed of Declaration settled for ever great legal difficulties; but it created, at the moment, some bitter personal disputes.

Wesley hesitated long, for example, as to the number of preachers who should constitute the legal Conference. The number was finally settled at a hundred. Then came the question of who were to form the list. Wesley at last wrote down a hundred names with his own hand. But this arrangement left many preachers out, and the excluded men were indignant. One hundred men were named in the Deed, and ninety-one left unnamed, and the relation betwixt the two groups had a vagueness which easily bred alarms. All had hitherto held an equal place in the Conference, but the Deed seemed to rend the body in two, and to leave every second man outside the legal pale.

Some of the helpers, including the two Hampsons, took an offence so deep that they left Wesley on this account. Coke was suspected of having induced Wesley to include only a hundred in the Deed, and as a result came into much temporary unpopularity. The accusation reached Wesley's ears, and he replied in emphatic Latin, "*Non vult, non potuit!*" An attempt was made to organise the discontent of the excluded men into open revolt. Circular letters were sent out calling upon the preachers to "take a stand" at the next Conference. But when the Conference met Wesley rose, with his saintly face and white hairs and frank speech, and made a calm and persuasive explanation of his act and of the reasons for it. Then, coming straight to the point, he bade all who were of his mind to stand up. They rose to a man!

Human nature counts for much, even in good men; and there was some real peril that the hundred members

of the Conference, in whom was vested all legal power, might claim pre-eminence over the other hundred, who were left without legal foothold. So the very document which was meant to bind the Conference into perpetual unity might rend it asunder. Late in 1785 Wesley, who saw this, wrote a letter which was to be read to the Conference after his death. The letter would thus come with the pathos and the authority of a message from the grave. It ran:—

"I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you never avail yourselves of the Deed of Declaration to assume any superiority over your brethren, but let all things go on, among those itinerants who choose to remain together, exactly in the same manner as when I was with you, so far as circumstances will permit.

"In particular, I beseech you, if you ever loved me, and if you now love God and your brethren, to have no respect of persons in stationing the preachers, in choosing children for Kingswood School, in disposing of the yearly contribution and the Preachers' Fund, or any other of the public money; but do all things with a single eye, as I have done from the beginning."

That letter did not reach the first Conference after Wesley's death till it had been some hours in session, and had already passed a resolution in almost exactly the same words. And, as a matter of fact, the spirit of Wesley's message has ruled the administration of affairs in the British Conference ever since. It has grown to be a tradition that has the force of law. The Legal Hundred claims no separate place from the rest of the Conference. It exercises no independent power. It is practically a mere registering machine, the instrument by which the decisions of the Conference as a whole are translated into legal terms.

# CHAPTER X

## WESLEY'S THEORY OF THE CHURCH

FEW things in ecclesiastical history are stranger than the circumstance that a century after Wesley's death, and when one of the greatest Protestant Churches in the world bears his name and is the direct fruit of his work, it should still be a matter of perplexed debate whether he ever intended the creation of a Church. Was it—or was it not—his purpose that Methodism should remain an order within the Anglican Church?

It is easy to dismiss the question with the obvious generalisation that he who plants the acorn must be held to intend the oak. But the puzzled reader wants to understand Wesley; and the task, looked at in some lights, is not easy. Wesley, it is true, was the frankest of men. He had absolutely no reserves. His correspondence in bulk equals that of Horace Walpole, and is infinitely more open and honest. Wesley, moreover, in his Journal, has photographed not merely his own character and work, but the changes of almost every day in his own moods. Betwixt his conversion in 1738 and his death in 1791 is a long stretch of fifty-three years, and through that whole period Wesley lived in a blaze of publicity. Every act he did is registered, almost every word is audible, well-nigh every letter is preserved. And yet, after reading everything Wesley has written, and studying everything that he did, doubt is possible to many anxious souls whether Methodism in becoming a Church has wrecked its founder's ideals or fulfilled them. If John Wesley came back in the flesh again, would he recognise his own work; and if he did, would he embrace it or renounce it?

It is easy to quote many sayings of Wesley which can be flung as reproaches and arguments against Wesley's Church by disputants who are eager to prove it has no

right to exist. And these inconvenient missiles are to be found not only in the utterances of his earlier years, when hot blood ran in his veins and High Church prejudices coloured his whole vision. They can be discovered in the later years of his life, when reason was cool, and when his work as an evangelist had reached its climax.

It was in 1787, within four years of his death, that Wesley wrote the oft-quoted sentence which at least proves that he had not the vision of a prophet: "When the Methodists leave the Church of England, God will leave them." A year later he declares: "The glory of the Methodists is not to be a separate body;" and that, "the more he reflected the more he was convinced that the Methodists ought not to leave the Church." Still a year later (in 1789) he declared that "none who regarded his judgment or advice would separate from the Church of England." What could be more emphatic than these statements? If the quotations could stop here the case would be closed.

It is true that at the stage of these sayings the Church of England had forgotten, in large measure at least, its early scorn of the Methodist revival. It had begun to dimly realise Wesley's greatness and the splendour of his services to religion. The church doors so long shut against him were now on every side thrown open. Wesley himself, his head white with the snows of over eighty years, and crowned with the spiritual honours of a career so memorable, was welcomed with veneration everywhere. "I have come somehow, I know not how," said the puzzled Wesley himself, "to be an honoured man." Bishops no longer attacked him. Clergymen no longer headed mobs to break up his services. Never again would a drunken divine thrust him from the sacramental table, as had once happened at Epworth. And this new mood on the part of the Anglican clergy might quite naturally have increased Wesley's always strong desire to keep his followers within the Church.

But this is by no means a sufficient explanation of the emphatic words about separation from the Church we have quoted. Those sentences are perhaps the only sayings of Wesley that a good many High Churchmen know by heart, and they derive infinite comfort from

them, while they probably cause not a little disquiet to some good Methodists when they happen to hear them quoted.

But then it is just as easy to quote a chain of sayings of an exactly opposite character from Wesley's lips and pen. "The uninterrupted succession," he declares, "I know to be a fable which no man ever did or could prove." "That it"—the episcopal form of Church government—"is prescribed by Scripture, I do not believe. This opinion, which I once zealously espoused, I have been heartily ashamed of since I read Bishop Stillingfleet's 'Irenicon.'" "Church or no Church," he says again, "we must attend to the work of saving souls."

Sometimes the satire of mere dates is very cruel. Thus on December 27, 1745, Wesley's brother-in-law, Hall, wrote a long letter, urging him to renounce the Church of England. Wesley, in reply, writes a letter in which the High Churchman is in the ascendant. He declares: "We believe it would not be right for us to administer either baptism or the Lord's Supper unless we had a commission so to do from those bishops whom we apprehend to be in succession of the Apostles. We believe that the threefold order of ministers is not only authorised by its apostolic institution, but also by the written Word. Yet," he adds, with characteristic frankness, "we are willing to hear and weigh whatever reasons you believe to the contrary." Less than four weeks after, however (January 20, 1746), he writes: "I set out for Bristol. On the road I read over Lord King's 'Account of the Primitive Church.' In spite of the vehement prejudice of my education I was compelled to believe that this was a fair and impartial draught (draft); but if so, it would follow that bishops and presbyters are (essentially) of one order, and that originally every Christian congregation was a Church independent of all others!"[1]

The irony of dates in this fashion is often discoverable in Wesley's acts and utterances. In April 1790, for example, he wrote the famous passage which has been quoted against the Methodist Church by angry sacerdotalists ever since:—

[1] Journal, p. 216.

"'I never had any design of separating from the Church. I have no such design now. I do not believe the Methodists in general design it when I am no more seen. I do, and will do, all that is in my power to prevent such an event. Nevertheless, in spite of all that I can do, many of them will separate from it (although I am apt to think not one-half, perhaps not one-third of them). These will be so bold and injudicious as to form a separate party. In flat opposition to these, I declare once more that I live and die a member of the Church of England, and that none who regards my judgment or advice will ever separate from it.'"

But only two months afterwards—in June of the same year—he writes to the Bishop of London: –

"I must speak plain, having nothing to hope or fear in this world, which I am on the point of leaving. The Methodists in general, my lord, are members of the Church of England. They hold all her doctrines, attend her services and partake of her sacraments. They do not willingly do harm to any one, but do what good they can to all. To encourage each other herein, they frequently spend an hour together in prayer and mutual exhortation. Permit me, then, to ask, 'Cui bono? for what reasonable end would your lordship drive these people out of the Church?' Your lordship does, and that in the most cruel manner; yes, and the most disingenuous manner. They desire a licence to worship God after their own conscience. Your lordship refuses it, and then punishes them for not having a licence! So your lordship leaves them only this alternative, 'Leave the Church or starve.' And is it a Christian—yea, a Protestant bishop—that so persecutes his own flock? I say persecutes, for it is persecution, to all intents and purposes. You do not burn them, indeed, but you starve them, and how small is the difference! And your lordship does this under colour of a vile, execrable law, not a whit better than that '*de heretico comburendo.*'"

Here, by Wesley's own testimony, a bishop of the Church of England is "driving" the unfortunate Methodists out of the Church, and is doing this "in the most cruel manner." How could Wesley himself hope they would stay in the Church?

But the best comment on Wesley's strong words about not separating from the Church of England is found in his own acts at the very time these words were written or spoken. Concurrently with these very words he took

steps, and took them under the irresistible compulsion of events, which tended to separation, which practically were acts of separation. In 1784, as we have seen, he constituted Methodism a legal entity, with assured continuity of existence. He made it, that is, a Church. In the same year he ordained Coke, Whatcoat, and Vasey for America, and this with full knowledge of Lord Mansfield's dictum that "ordination is separation." In 1785 he ordained some of his helpers for Scotland, justifying the act by the plain necessities of his societies there, and by the circumstance that the Anglican episcopate did not cross the Border. In 1787 he licensed many of his buildings under the Toleration Act as Dissenting chapels. In 1789 he ordained some of his helpers for England.

All these were acts of separation. They constituted Methodism a Church. And yet, while Wesley was performing these very acts he was speaking, or writing, words which forbade separation, at least during his own life! The puzzle, on the face of it, is very great. Is it to be solved by charging Wesley with inconsistency or insincerity? But that explanation, at least, is utterly incredible. It is contradicted by Wesley's whole character and career.

The explanation is to be found in that theory of the Church which Wesley, since his conversion at least, had always held, but which had not always been clear to his own consciousness, or allowed to colour his speech and determine his policy. We have shown how, almost up to the day of his conversion, Wesley was a High Churchman and a Ritualist of the severest type. His sacerdotalism had running through it a strain of the ascetic; it glowed with the ardour of a fanatic. He refused the Lord's Supper to all who had not been baptized by a minister with due orders. He rebaptized the children of Dissenters; he held the theory of the Apostolic Succession in its extremest form.

But his conversion changed the whole perspective, not only of Wesley's life, but of his theology, and of his ecclesiastical views. All his High Church theories were jettisoned. Religion, for him, was no longer mechanical but spiritual. Ecclesiastical formulæ and methods were but as husks and chaff when weighed against spiritual realities.

Christ, as Wesley now saw, was present in His own Church, and governed it. His grace did not trickle exclusively through some poor little, uncertain, and solitary human pipe; it did not depend on the touch of a particular set of ordaining human hands on certain human heads. It was Christ's direct gift to the personal soul. The Holy Ghost, in Wesley's new theology, was no longer relegated to some far-off day in early Church history; the mind of that Spirit was not exclusively expressed in certain ancient Church usages. The Divine Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Light, was as surely present in the Church of the eighteenth century as in the Apostolic Church. The Day of Pentecost, on this reading of history, is not a particular set of twenty-four hours in Jerusalem many centuries ago. It is to-day! Men live in it. The winds of Pentecost no longer blow, its cloven tongues of flame are no longer visible; but though the signs given to the senses of man on that far-off day in Jerusalem have vanished, the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church is continued. So, for Wesley, the mechanical High Church theory was no longer credible.

But this new view of Wesley about the Church did not at once find full expression. It was not clear always to his own consciousness. He continued, at intervals, to talk High Church language long after he had renounced the whole High Church theory. His mind on this subject was a sort of palimpsest. The evangelical theory as to the Church was written large and indelibly upon it, to be read of all men. But hidden beneath, and visible to those who searched, were fragments, in dim and broken syllables, of the old and renounced High Church doctrine.

The key to Wesley's apparently contradictory acts and words in relation to the Church of England may be found in his famous "Twelve Reasons against Separation," published in 1758. The opening sentence in that document defines Wesley's position: "Whether it be lawful or not, which itself may be disputed, being not so clear a point as some may imagine, it is by no means *expedient* to separate from the Established Church." Wesley, that is, made *expediency*—the question of more or less practical efficiency—the supreme test of ecclesiastical forms; and that position is fatal to the whole High Church theory.

The Twelve Reasons which follow all belong to the category of expediencies and inexpediencies. No. 8, for example, runs: "Because to form the plan of a new Church would require infinite time and care (which might be far more profitably bestowed) with much more wisdom and greater depth and extensiveness of thought than any of us are masters of." No. 10 runs, "Because the experiment has been so frequently tried already, and the success never answered the expectation."

Charles Wesley added a note saying his brother's "reasons against our ever separating from the Church of England are mine also. I subscribe to them with all my heart. Only, with regard to the first, I am quite clear that it is neither expedient nor lawful for *me* to separate."[1]

The date of these "Twelve Reasons" is significant, as it shows that at this early stage of their work the two brothers were parted from each other by fundamental differences in Church theory. John Wesley held separation to be expedient; whether it was lawful or not he declined to say. Charles Wesley is quite clear that separation is "neither expedient nor lawful," and that sentence marks the watershed which divides two irreconcilable ecclesiastical systems. For Charles Wesley separation was a sin!

His own conduct, of course, was hardly consistent with that heroic doctrine. He was guilty, in fact, of a thousand acts in conflict with it. He was the first of the brothers to administer the Lord's Supper in an unconsecrated building. He preached and administered the sacraments for years in City Road Chapel, yet he held the building to be such an ecclesiastical offence that he gave directions he was not to be buried in it.

John Wesley, for his part, refuses to pronounce whether separation is unlawful, "a point," he says drily, "not so clear as some may imagine." He would not discuss that abstract question at the moment; for this would have been the signal for a controversy which might have rent the goodly companionship of his comrades asunder. But the theory as to the Church Wesley expressed at this early date is essentially and profoundly anti-sacerdotal.

It is possible to quote from Wesley's writings a chain

[1] Smith, p. 275.

of utterances, calm, reasoned, and positive, and running through the whole stretch of his public work, in illustration of his views on Church order.

Does the New Testament, for example, supply a single authoritative pattern of Church government which is binding on the universal Christian conscience, and outside which are to be found only the uncovenanted mercies of the Divine Grace? Says Wesley:—

"As to my own judgment, I still believe 'the Episcopal form of Church government' to be Scriptural and apostolical. I mean, well agreeing with the practice and writings of the Apostles. But that it is prescribed in Scripture I do not believe. Bishop Stillingfleet has unanswerably proved that 'neither Christ nor His Apostles prescribe any particular form of Church government, and that the plea of divine right for Diocesan Episcopacy was never heard of in the Primitive Church."[1]

The doctrine of the succession is, on the sacerdotal reading of Church order, necessary to the validity of the Christian ministry; but that doctrine Wesley absolutely rejects, and he sees with characteristic keenness where the theory breaks down:—

"I deny that the Romish bishops came down by uninterrupted succession from the Apostles. I never could see it proved; and, I am persuaded, I never shall. But, farther, it is a doctrine of your Church that the intention of the administrator is essential to the validity of the sacraments which are administered by him. If you pass for a priest, are you assured of the intention of the bishop that ordained you? If not, you may happen to be no priest, and so all your ministry is nothing worth; nay, by the same rule, he may happen to be no bishop. And who can tell how often this has been the case? But if there has been only one such instance in a thousand years, what becomes of your uninterrupted succession?"[2]

Through the writings of Wesley for fifty years, to sum up, there runs a chain of emphatic utterances which prove that the High Church theory was an offence alike to his reason and his conscience. A thousand prepossessions and prejudices, of course, bound him to the Church of his birth and training. The whole character of his genius

[1] Works, vol. xiii. p. 211. [2] *Ibid.*, vol. iii. p. 44.

made him averse to unnecessary changes. He clung to historic forms even when he was making them the vehicle of new forces, and to venerable words when they were charged with new meanings. But he never admitted that separation stood in the category of a sin. It was a question of practical advantage or disadvantage, to be determined by the circumstances of the moment. That which to-day was so inexpedient as to represent a disaster, might to-morrow be so expedient as to become an obligation.

His people, he declares, "will, even after my death, remain in the Church unless they be thrust out!" And that dreadful and cruel contingency became a fact. They were thrust out! They were being thrust out even while Wesley lived. And yet Wesley himself was held by a hundred forces which had no relation to conscience, and sometimes not even to reason, from open breach with the Church. He foresaw the possibility of separation from the very beginning of his work. The possibility, step by step, became a probability. It grew into a certainty. But always it was for Wesley himself a thing undesired; to be approached only by the slowest stages, and only as compelled by the logic of facts.

It is almost amusing, indeed, to note, as we have shown, for how long Wesley talked the language of the High Churchman, after he had utterly cast High Church theology overboard. His ecclesiastical prejudices gave an accent to his speech and governed his tastes for years after they had been renounced by his reason and conscience. But his conversion, we repeat, shifted the whole centre of his theology. From that moment he saw that Church forms were questions of expediency. Expediencies and inexpediencies had to be weighed together; sometimes the scale might incline one way, sometimes another. That it finally turned in the direction of separation history proves. And while Wesley himself never formally left the Church of England, he gave to Methodism a form and powers which meant separation.

Wesley, it cannot be doubted, lies open to the charge of verbal inconsistency. All that can be said is that old mental habits clung to him, old verbal formulæ crept to

his lips and to the tip of his pen long after they had been drained of their meaning. The influence of his brother Charles was a force pulling him always in the High Church direction. So it happened that at intervals he still talked like a High Churchman when he was doing things—things to him urgent, inevitable, sacred—which were fatal to the whole High Church theory.

The relations of Wesley with the Anglican Church, it will thus be seen, are the story of an education. We have the picture of an eager, logical, and intensely earnest character breaking, thread by thread, the bonds woven of early training, early beliefs, and passionate ecclesiastical prejudices, and giving effect, though slowly and reluctantly, to his deeper convictions. The practical note in Wesley's genius, his habit of taking short views, and of dealing with difficulties only when they became concrete and urgent, makes the process slow; while his frankness and directness of speech at each stage of the process supply a chain of utterances which often seem in conflict with each other. Each utterance, indeed, has to be interpreted by its date, and read in the light of the particular set of circumstances with which it dealt. His very honesty to the mood and circumstance of the moment is sometimes, indeed, the real explanation of some saying which contradicts another utterance dealing with another set of conditions. And Wesley, it cannot be denied, retained, in fragments at least, the vocabulary of sacerdotalism long after he had cast the whole sacerdotal theory resolutely overboard.

Who studies, in a word, this, the most keenly criticised aspect of Wesley's work, finds in it the picture of a man with an obstinate High Church bias drawing him in one direction, a bias due to birth and training and temperament; whilst, step by step, led by Providence and compelled by facts, he moves on a path which leads to quite another goal, a goal undesired but not wholly unseen.

# CHAPTER XI

## THE FINAL STEPS

The question whether Wesley intended his followers to remain a society or to become a Church is, as we have said, one of purely academic, or even antiquarian, interest. The relation of Methodism to the Anglican Church was decided in the end by forces outside Wesley's will. Some of these forces are to be found in the character of the clergy of that day and the policy they adopted. The drunken curate who at Epworth denied Wesley the Sacrament in his father's church; the clergy who inspired mobs to attack the Methodists, and sometimes led them in the attack, were no doubt evil exceptions to their class. But the utterly unspiritual character of the clergy made it impossible to leave the converts won by the Revival in their careless hands. To have done this would have been a crime against human souls. Moreover, the great mass of the clergy, from the Bishops downwards, were resolutely bent on driving the early Methodists out of the Church. "You are our greatest enemies," Prebend Church wrote to Wesley in 1744; and that dreadful sentence makes audible what, for many sad years, was the general mind of the clergy towards the Revival.

"It was not in the power of the Bishops to crush the new order," says Miss Wedgwood, "but the strange anomalies of English law left it in their power to force it to become a sect." No religious meetings outside the ordinary services of the Church could be held without a licence under the Toleration Act; and those taking part in such meetings, in order to secure the right to hold them, had to register themselves as Dissenters. This law extended to America, and so the first Methodist Church in the United States was adorned with that very unecclesiastical bit of architecture—a chimney. When a

Methodist church was built it had to disguise itself as a house in order to secure the right to exist.

It can easily be seen what a formidable weapon such a law was in the hands of the clergy, and it was used against the Methodists with relentless severity. The last important letter Wesley wrote, says Miss Wedgwood, "was a remonstrance addressed to a Bishop who, by giving information against all Methodists meeting in unlicensed houses, and getting them fined, forced them to apply for a licence as Dissenters."

The state of the law, and the temper of the clergy in the use of that law, thus compelled Wesley, in even the earliest stages of his work, to take steps which were in effect acts of separation from the Church of England. He could only secure for his helpers the most rudimentary liberties of speech by labelling them Dissenters; and so, in 1748, the new room at Bristol was licensed, and Methodists using it were described in the licence as "Protestant subjects dissenting from the Church of England."

City Road Chapel, from 1778, became Wesley's head-quarters, and it was in itself a visible symbol of the relation the Methodist movement has assumed towards the Church. It was an unconsecrated building; but services were held in it in church hours, and the sacraments were systematically administered there. The very building was thus a bit of concrete dissent, a symbol of the new Church which had already come into existence, but had hardly attained self-consciousness. In 1784, Wesley writes in his Journal, "a kind of separation has already taken place, and will inevitably spread, though by slow degrees." "Their enemies," he says again, "provoke them to it, the clergy in particular, most of whom, far from thanking them for continuing in the Church, use all the means in their power, fair and unfair, to drive them out of it."

The question of the sacraments, however, proved the turning point in the relations betwixt Methodism and the Church. The Salvation Army, to-day, treats the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper as, at best, a luxury, and makes no arrangement to gather its converts round the table of the Lord; and this is a fatal defect in its organisation. But Wesley held that the adminis-

tration of the sacraments was binding on the Christian conscience, and he required his converts to observe them as a matter of duty and value them as a means of grace. But they must resort to the parish church in order to attend the Lord's Supper; and here, too often, was found a clergyman whose character was an offence to morals, or an intolerant fanatic who drove them from Christ's table as mere intruders. The Wesleys themselves repeatedly suffered that indignity in their own persons. At Bristol, as early as 1740, Wesley's converts were repelled by the clergy, on an agreed plan, and with unrelenting severity, from the Lord's table, and this explains why the new room there was licensed so early as a dissenting place of worship.

But Wesley's instinct for order made it intolerable to him that the Sacrament should be administered by any one save an ordained minister. At Bristol and London he was able, with the help of a few clergy who stood by him, to maintain the regular administration of the sacraments. But to do this over the area of the three kingdoms was practically impossible; and in America geography and history alike made the situation incomparably more difficult. Here were a few almost accidental clergy scattered at distant points over the area of a continent. Political passion burned like a flame through the whole community, and in nine cases out of ten these clergy were in open political quarrel with their own flocks. The attempt to keep the fast-growing Methodist Societies dependent for the sacraments on a handful of Anglican clergymen under such conditions, both of geography and politics, was idle. Then came the War of Independence, and like some fierce whirlwind it drove the Anglican clergy from the field completely.

Wesley, as we have seen, appealed to the English Bishops to ordain at least one of his helpers for the purpose of administering the sacraments in America, but the appeal was rejected. The Bishops were careless of even their own flocks in the revolting colonies. They were politicians rather than pastors, and were not disposed to exhibit any very tender anxiety for the spiritual interests of mere rebels. On the High Church theory the sacraments are essential to salvation; they can only

be administered by persons duly ordained, and in the Apostolic Succession. To refuse, or to delay, the presence of properly ordained clergymen to a whole community is, on the sacerdotal logic, to imperil the eternal welfare of human souls. Yet, when a delegate from the United States came to England to procure episcopal ordination, for the purpose of taking back to the dying souls of a continent the mystic grace of which ordination is supposed to be the exclusive channel, he was kept knocking at the doors of episcopal palaces for two years. Benjamin Franklin wrote in characteristic accents of common-sense on the situation: "A hundred years hence, when people are more enlightened, 'twill be wondered at that men in America, qualified by their learning and piety to pray for and instruct their neighbours, should not be permitted to do it till they have made a voyage of 6000 miles to ask leave of a cross old gentleman at Canterbury."

Wesley found that he must provide for his own flock in America. The sacraments must be maintained, and they must be administered by duly ordained men. But Wesley held that he himself was as much an episcopos, and as fully entitled to ordain, as any Bishop in the land. "Lord King's account of the primitive Church," he says, "convinced me, many years ago, that Bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain." He had held his hand too long, to the sore injury of his Societies in America, and at the risk of rending Methodism in that country to fragments. Accordingly, on September 2, 1784, he ordained Coke as Superintendent or Bishop, and Whatcoat and Vasey as presbyters, for America.

This act plainly brought to open rupture the whole relations of Methodism and the Church of England. Charles Wesley was thrown into a mood of frantic remonstrance:—

"I can scarce believe it (he wrote) that in his eighty-second year, my brother, my old, intimate friend and companion, should have assumed the episcopal character, ordained elders, consecrated a Bishop, and sent him to ordain our lay-preachers in America. How was he surprised into so rash an action? Lord Mansfield told me last year that ordination was separation. This my brother does not, and will not, see; or that he has renounced the principles

and practice of his whole life; that he has acted contrary to all his declarations, protestations, and writings; robbed his friends of their boastings; realised the Nag's Head ordination; and left an indelible blot on his name, as long as it shall be remembered. Thus our partnership here is dissolved, but not our friendship. I have taken him for better, for worse, till death do us part; or, rather, reunites us in love inseparable."

He wrote in distressed and pathetic terms to John Wesley himself: "Before you have quite broken down the bridge, stop and consider. Go to your grave in peace, or at least suffer me to go before this ruin. So much I think you owe to my father, my brother, and to me, as to stay till I am taken from this evil. I am on the brink of the grave. Do not push me in, or embitter my last moments. . . . This letter is a debt to our parents, and to our brother, as well as to you."

John Wesley's reply is calm, but unyielding:—

"I will tell you my thoughts in all simplicity (he writes to him on August 19, 1785). If you agree with me, well. If not, we can, as Mr. Whitefield used to say, 'agree to disagree.' For these forty years I have been in doubt concerning that question, What obedience is due to 'heathenish priests and mitred infidels'? [A line of his brother's.] I have from time to time proposed my doubts to the most pious and sensible clergymen I know. But they gave me no satisfaction. Rather, they seemed to be puzzled as well as me. Obedience I have always paid to the Bishops, in obedience to the laws of the land. But I cannot see that I am under any obligation to obey them farther than those laws require.

"It is in obedience to these laws that I have never exercised in England the power which I believe God has given me. I firmly believe I am a Scriptural episcopos, as much as any man in England, or in Europe. For the uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable, which no man ever did or can prove. But this does in no way interfere with my remaining in the Church of England, from which I have no more desire to separate than I had fifty years ago. . . . I no more separate from it now than I did in the year 1758. I submit still (though sometimes with a doubting conscience) to 'mitred infidels.' I walk still by the same rule I have done for between forty and fifty years. I do nothing rashly. It is not likely I should. The heyday of my blood is over. If you will go on hand in hand with me, do. But do not hinder me, if you will not help me."

Charles Wesley wrote again, declaring he was filled with alarm at "an approaching schism as causeless and unprovoked as the American Revolution, and at your own eternal disgrace. I," he said, "creep on in the old way in which we set out together, and trust to continue in it until I finish my course." Then the brother in him breaks out. "We have taken each other for better, for worse, till death do us—part?—no, till we meet eternally. Therein, in the love which never faileth, I am your affectionate friend and brother."

John Wesley brought the correspondence to a close by saying, "I see no use of you and me disputing together, for neither of us is likely to convince the other." Charles Wesley had disavowed his own juvenile line about "heathenish priests and mitred infidels," but John Wesley goes on to say, "Your verse is a sad truth. I see fifty times more of England than you do, and I find few exceptions to it." Then he adds: "If you will not or cannot help me yourself, do not hinder those that can and will. I must, and will, save as many souls as I can while I live, without being careful about what may possibly be when I die."

Wesley, meanwhile, had published a statement explaining and justifying the American ordinations. It runs:—

"Bristol, *September* 10, 1784.—To Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and our other brethren in North America. By a very uncommon train of providences, many of the provinces of North America are totally disjoined from their mother country, and erected into independent States. The English Government has no authority over them, either civil or ecclesiastical, any more than over the States of Holland. A civil authority is exercised over them partly by the Congress, partly by the Provincial Assemblies. But no one either exercises or claims any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this particular situation some thousands of the inhabitants of these States desire my advice; and, in compliance with their desire, I have drawn up a little sketch.

". . . The case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are Bishops who have a legal jurisdiction. In America there are none. Neither any parish ministers. So that, for hundreds of miles together, there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's Supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I

violate no order, and invade no man's right, by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest.

"I have, accordingly, appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint Superintendents over our brethren in North America; as also Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey to act as elders among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper. . . .

"If any one will point out a more rational and Scriptural way of feeding and guiding these poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it. At present, I cannot see any better method than I have taken."[1]

It is to be noted, Wesley ordained Coke as "Superintendent," not as Bishop. He knew the power of words, and desired to avoid the use of a term sure to provoke controversy. With the stubborn conservatism of his type, too, he was anxious to preserve old verbal forms, even when they became charged with new meanings. But Coke and Asbury in America discovered no necessity for putting any verbal disguise on recognised facts, and they adopted the term Bishop. It is still amusing to read Wesley's alarmed comments on this circumstance. He writes to Asbury:—

"In one point, my dear brother, I am a little afraid, both the doctor and you differ from me. I study to be little; you study to be great. I creep; you strut along. I found a school; you a college! Nay, call it after your own names! Oh, beware, do not seek to be something! Let me be nothing, and 'Christ be all in all!'

"One instance of this, of your greatness, has given me great concern. How can you, how dare you, suffer yourself to be called 'Bishop'? I shudder, I start at the very thought! Men may call me a knave or a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel, and I am content; but they shall never, by my consent, call me 'Bishop'! For my sake, for God's sake, for Christ's sake, put a full end to this! Let the Presbyterians do what they please; but let the Methodists know their calling better."

That letter shows how complete, on certain subjects, was Wesley's slavery to words, even at this late period of his life. He could do bold things, revolutionary things. But in characteristic English fashion he wanted to label them with tame and conventional phrases.

[1] Smith, p. 512.

Having adopted, on clear and reasoned principles, the policy of ordaining his own helpers, Wesley steadily proceeded to give it larger application. He ordained other helpers, but always on the logic of necessity, and only in the order of necessity. He would do what the plain facts of each case required; but still with as little disturbance of existing order, and as little shock to the prejudices of others, as possible. In 1785, "having," he writes, "with a few other friends weighed the matter thoroughly, I yielded to their judgment, and set apart three of our well-tried preachers, John Pawson, Thomas Hanby, Joseph Taylor, to minister in Scotland." He further recommended to the Scotch Methodists the use of the abridged Common Prayer, a circumstance which showed that John Wesley did not even yet understand the Scottish character.

Wesley recites the reasons which moved him to ordain these three helpers for Scotland. There could be no conflict of jurisdiction, as no Anglican Bishop had any spiritual charge beyond the Border. Wesley's further reasons are: (1) The desire of doing more good; (2) the absolute necessity of the case, as the Scotch ministers had repeatedly refused to give the Methodists the Sacrament unless they would leave the Societies.

In 1786 he ordained helpers for Ireland and the West Indies. On November 3, 1787, in his very last Journal occurs a very notable record: "I had a long conversation with Mr. Clulow (as Attorney) on that execrable Act called the Conventicle Act. After consulting the Act of Toleration, with that of the fourteenth [tenth, Author] of Queen Anne, we were both clearly convinced that it was the safest way to license all our chapels and all our travelling preachers; and that no justice, or bench of justices, has any authority to refuse licensing either the house or the preachers."

On February 27, 1789, Wesley ordained Alexander Mather as Superintendent or Bishop, and Thomas Rankin and Henry Moore as presbyters, for England. He clothed them with power to feed the flock of Christ, and to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper according to the usages of the Church of England, and within the boundaries of England. And he set apart Mather as Superintendent or Bishop that he might ordain other helpers, and so a regular ministry in the

Methodist Church be maintained even after Wesley's death.[1]

And he did all this knowing, in Lord Mansfield's words, that "ordination is separation." In these plain and great facts, not in casual phrases picked from his letters and Journal, is to be found Wesley's purpose as to the future of Methodism.

Wesley's ordinations are explained by Knox, in a letter which Southey published as an appendix to his biography, as due to an old man's failure in reasoning faculties. But this explanation proves, for the High Church critics who quote it, quite too much. Wesley ordained Coke, Vasey, and Whatcoat in 1784, and, on Knox's theory, his memory and intellect were then suffering from senile decay. But the famous Korah sermon, which is a mine of delightful quotations for the sacerdotal critics of Methodism, was preached in 1789, or five years later, and must, on Alexander Knox's logic, represent, still more completely than even the much-challenged ordinations, the decay of Wesley's reasoning faculty!

The Korah sermon—a sermon on the ministerial office—is, of course, perfectly consistent with Wesley's whole policy. It was preached at Cork on May 4, 1789, and intended as a rebuke to some Irish helpers who had taken upon themselves to administer the Sacrament without Wesley's authority. "Where did I appoint you to do this?" he asks. "Nowhere at all. In doing it you renounce the first principle of Methodism, which is wholly and solely to preach the Gospel." Wesley would ordain his helpers to administer the Sacraments when he found this to be necessary, but he would not tolerate his helpers ordaining themselves. And it must be remembered that, not quite three months before he preached the Korah sermon, he ordained Mather as a Superintendent or Bishop, and Rankin and Moore as presbyters, for England.

It is often said, in spite of the facts which are here recited, that Wesley never intended Methodism to be anything more than a society within the Church. He planned it as a society, he left it a society; he forbade it to be a Church. The answer, of course, is obvious that

[1] Jackson's "Life of Charles Wesley," p. 431.

whatever Wesley intended, history has proved Methodism to be a Church in the largest sense; and its founder, like the men who laid the foundation of the great American republic, builded better than he knew.

But was Wesley deceived by a phrase? Did he look upon the great spiritual system taking shape about him, with its perfect and flexible organisation, as a mere "society," an accidental, or at least temporary, cluster of unrelated atoms? In his famous sermon on Schism Wesley discusses at length the question, What is a Church? "A more ambiguous word than this — the Church"—he says, "is scarcely to be found in the English language." But with his keen logic, and his terse, nervous English, Wesley struck out all ambiguity from the word. "The Catholic or Universal Church," he says, "is all the persons in the universe whom God had called out of the world. A national Church is that part of the great body of the Universal Church which inhabits any one kingdom or nation." The Church of England was a national Church in that sense. But what, reduced to its simplest and imperishable elements, is a Church? "Two or three Christian believers united together," Wesley replies, "are a Church. A particular Church may consist of any number of persons, whether two or three or two or three millions."

Wesley, in a word, drew deep and clear the distinction betwixt the national Establishment and a Church. They were not equivalent terms. Methodism was not a national Church; but tried by the tests of the spiritual order to which it belonged, it was a true Church. As a matter of fact, Wesley often uses the terms "Society" and "Church" as interchangeable. His obstinate and, on the whole, wise mental habit of using old terms, even when they are charged with new meanings, disguises this fact from many critics. But the fact is beyond doubt. As early as 1749 he is discussing in the Conference of that year a scheme for linking the Societies together. "May not that in London, the mother Church," he asks, "consult with the others for the sake of all the Churches?"[1]

The Societies, already, in Wesley's eyes, were true

[1] Minutes of Conference, 1749, p. 44.

Churches in the exact sense of that definition of a Church which we have already quoted.

For Methodists themselves the question whether Methodism is a true Church is not to be determined by the labours of antiquarians, or settled by quotations and dates from Wesley's Journal. The question belongs to another and a loftier realm, and is determined by graver tests. Let the essential character of the Methodist revival be remembered. It was a re-birth of the spiritual elements of Christianity; a new manifestation of its spiritual force; a return to its simpler forms. It raised, and raises, no question as to the mere externalities of religion. It broke out of the spiritual realm; it worked by spiritual forces, and for only spiritual ends. And a true and profound philosophy, in harmony with this, underlay the whole movement and determined the ecclesiastical forms in which the new spiritual life was to express itself.

In what may be called the grammar of Methodism the emphasis lay, not on creeds, or symbols, or questions of Church polity and order. It rested on spiritual qualities; on the relation of the personal soul to the personal Saviour.

Its theology stands in direct relation to spiritual life. Its Church polity is a wedlock of vital doctrines and of practical experiences. The Church, according to its definition, is spiritual life—the spiritual life of individual souls—organised, knitted together in organic forms for ends of worship and service. All forms, symbols, methods, creeds are secondary to this, and are of value only as they ensure this.

Let it be asked, why does a great writer like Isaac Taylor, an historian who is also a philosopher, and who, in a sense, is a severe critic of Methodism, yet declare that "Methodism is the starting-point of our modern religious history," and that "the events whence the religious epoch now current dates its commencement is the field-preaching of Whitefield and Wesley in 1739." It is because Methodism set in true and spiritual perspective all that relates to the Church and to religion. In the Church of that sad day second things had become first. The external was more than the spiritual. Rites and symbols and creeds were not merely means to an end greater than

themselves—the creation of a spiritual life—they were ends in themselves.

Methodism was preceded by the German Reformation of Luther, and the English Reformation of Cranmer. But both these were incomplete. Luther's Reformation was marred by the Papal strain left in it. There is a sacramentarian taint in its theology. "It began in ideas," says one keen critic, "and ended in force." It certainly was a reformation arrested in mid-career. The English Reformation of the sixteenth century was in the main political. It left State and Church linked together, to the injury of both. How imperfect a divorce from the Papacy it effected is proved by the frequent relapses into Papal doctrine of which its history is full. Edward VI. was followed by "Bloody" Mary, Elizabeth by Charles I., Cromwell by James II. and Charles II., of whom one died a Papist, and the other inverted the policy of Henri Quatre, and sold a kingdom for a Mass.

Anglicanism, in a word, with its sacramentarian theology and its prelatical rule, and the Puritanism of the Commonwealth, with its fierce temper and political leaven, represent the swing of the pendulum to opposite extremes. Methodism, on the other hand, with all its limitations, aims at a purely spiritual reading of Christianity. Forms to it are secondary matters. It can do with Bishops or without them. The Presbyterian or the Episcopal theory of Church government may be equally, or unequally, effective; but neither is mandatory. The fiercest doctrinal controversy in Wesley's life was that concerning Calvinism. But when he abridged the "articles of religion" for his Societies in America, he phrased them so as to leave that great controversy wholly untouched, and make it possible for Calvinist and Arminian alike to sing the same hymns and worship under the same church roof. Wesley himself said once to his preachers, "I have no more right to object to a man for holding a different opinion from my own than I have to differ with a man because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair, though I have a right to object if he shakes the powder about my eyes."

Wesley thus was a great religious leader to whom spiritual fact was everything and ecclesiastical form nothing. It was inevitable that he should be careless

as to the exact ecclesiastical definition of his own movement. Was Methodism a Church, or to become a Church? If so, what label must it bear? By what form should it be governed? These were questions which Wesley was not anxious either to ask or to answer. He postponed them in order to escape controversy; he left them to be settled by history. The critics of after generations wage interminable debate on these points. To Wesley himself any importance the debate had was due to the persistence and tyranny of old mental habits. To his Church the debate has neither reality nor significance. It represents a quarrel of ecclesiastical antiquarians. It is a question which history has settled — or rather God, who works through history, and shapes it.

# CHAPTER XII

## THE EFFECTIVE DOCTRINES OF METHODISM

What we have called the doctrinal secret of the Revival has already been discussed; but here we are describing the enduring historical result of the great movement, the Church into which it crystallised; and it may be asked what are the permanent characteristics in teaching and discipline, in belief and structure, of that Church? "My doctrines," said Wesley himself, "are simply the common fundamental principles of Christianity." Or, to use another of his phrases, "they are the plain old religion of the Church of England"; and that is perfectly true.

Wesley added no new province to theology. He invented no new doctrine, he slew no ancient heresy. Whatever may be Wesley's title to fame, it is not that of a leader of men into new and unguessed realms of theological speculation. It is sometimes said that he set old doctrines in a new perspective. He changed the theological emphasis of the Thirty-nine Articles; and he did it in an enduring fashion, which makes it, so to speak, his signature on the theology of his Church to-day. As far as this is true, it applies to those doctrines which touch the central things of salvation—a divine redemption, a realised pardon, a present and conscious salvation from sin. At these points Wesley certainly drew into life and consciousness many forgotten truths in "the plain old religion of the Church of England."

There is a real—though not always recognised—philosophy underlying the doctrinal teachings of Wesley. They constitute an interpretation of Christianity which may be judged of as a whole. To describe that teaching fully would be to write an entire system of theology, and cannot, of course, be attempted here. But it is worth while to offer in barest outline a statement of what may be called Wesley's working creed.

Wesley sums this up himself in one familiar statement:—

"Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are repentance, faith, and holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third, religion itself."[1]

But a whole theology cannot be condensed into a single metaphor in this fashion. Behind the metaphor stands a symmetrical and spacious creed.

Wesley began by a noble conception of the universe as built on a moral plan and existing for moral ends. Its ideal and law are found in the will of God, its Creator; but that will is not an arbitrary force. Goodness is not goodness because God chose to enact it. It is the reflex of an eternal necessity, a necessity lying in the very nature of God Himself. The moral law Wesley traced, in Southey's words, "beyond the foundation of the world to that period, unknown indeed to men, but doubtless enrolled in the annals of eternity, when the morning stars sang together." As Wesley himself put it: "The law of God is supreme, unchangeable reason; it is unalterable rectitude; it is the everlasting fitness of all things that are or ever were created."

Man was created under this law, created that in him it might find its fulfilment. But obedience to that law must be the voluntary service of a free spirit. So Wesley believed profoundly in the doctrine of the freedom of the human will. It is this which constitutes man a moral agent. The denial of it makes goodness impossible. Set in man's nature is an august faculty which carries with it measureless possibilities. It is the power to say "No," even to God, and through the gate of that awful power sin comes into the world. But it is also the power to say "Yes" to God, and so to render Him a service impossible to suns and planets; a worship unknown to the whole material universe beside. Man, in Wesley's words, was "not a clod of earth, a lump of clay without sense or understanding, but a spirit like his Creator; a spirit endowed with a free will, the power of choosing good or evil, of directing his own affections and actions."

[1] Stevens, p. 327.

And in his first choice man fell. He sinned; and he incurred the one inevitable penalty of sin—death. Death is a term which includes many meanings. It is not exhausted by the divorce that rends the body and the undying spirit asunder. In the moment of sin man suffered that most dreadful of all deaths—separation from God. So he became liable to death eternal. And as he was the head of the human race, and the seeds and souls of all mankind were contained in him, the moral standing of the whole human race was affected by his act.

Wesley did not, of course, believe in any transfer of personal guilt. If any man perishes it will be because he himself has broken God's law, not because some one else—Adam, or any other—has broken it. The guilt of wrongdoing lies eternally and solely on the wrongdoer. The doctrine that the sin of Adam constitutes in any literal sense the guilt of any of his children was to Wesley, as it must be to the healthy reason of all men, abhorrent. "Whatsoever," says Wesley, "it hath pleased God to do of His sovereign pleasure as Creator, He will judge the world in righteousness, and every man therein according to the strictest justice. He will punish no man for doing anything which he could not possibly avoid, neither for omitting anything he could not possibly do." Yet many of the consequences of wrongdoing visibly and necessarily extend to others than the one actually guilty of it. The child of the drunkard is not burdened with the guilt of drunkenness; but it has a partnership in the evil consequences that vice creates. Drunkenness in a father means hunger, rags, and misery for the child.

Now Wesley believed profoundly in the doctrine of the Fall. It is the clear teaching, he held, of Scripture. It is verified in the personal consciousness of each man. It is the one fact which explains the moral disorder and misery of the world. The evidence that the human race is implicated in what Newman calls "some terrible aboriginal calamity" is writ large not only on every page of history, but on every issue of the daily newspaper. But Wesley never separated the doctrine of man's fall from the great twin doctrine of man's redemption. When Adam sinned the terms of moral probation were changed for him and for the whole human race; and the new terms

are those of redemption in Christ Jesus. Here is a sacrifice for sin, given in promise from the very moment of the Fall, which opens the gate to forgiveness. Here is a gift of divine grace through the Holy Spirit which makes a restored character and a holy life possible. And looking at the doctrine of the Fall through the lens of redemption, Wesley found in it that perpetual miracle of the divine love which turns moral failure itself into a new possibility of moral victory.

Man's fall, in this sense, was not a defeat for God's plans. It was the occasion of a new and more glorious evolution of them; and through Christ's redemption man is enriched by the Fall. Southey summarises Wesley's teaching on this point very happily:—

"If man had not fallen there must have been a blank in our faith and in our love. There could have been no such thing as faith in God 'so loving the world that He gave His only Son for us men and for our salvation'; no faith in the Son of God, as loving us, and giving Himself for us; no faith in the Spirit of God, as renewing the image of God in our hearts, or raising us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness. And the same blank must likewise have been in our love. We could not have loved the Father under the nearest and dearest relation, as delivering up His Son for us; we could not have loved the Son, as bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; we could not have loved the Holy Ghost, as revealing to us the Father and the Son, as opening the eyes of our understandings, bringing us out of darkness into His marvellous light, renewing the image of God in our soul, and sealing us unto the day of redemption."[1]

On the atoning work of Jesus Christ, with its mysteries deep beyond all sounding and high above all vision, Wesley dwelt with constant emphasis, but always in the language of scripture. "Christ died for our offences and rose again for our justification." "We have redemption in His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." And the condition upon which all the measureless grace of that atonement becomes effective in human experience is simply faith. But faith, as Wesley understood it, is not some mood of intellectual assent; it is not a mere set of opinions. "A string of opinions," he said, "is no more

[1] Southey, ii. p. 53.

Christian faith than a string of beads is Christian holiness." His description of faith has in it a certain glow of imagination not common in his writings.

"Faith is a power wrought by the Almighty in an immortal spirit inhabiting a house of clay, to see through that veil into the world of spirits, into things invisible and eternal. . . . It is the eye of the new-born soul, whereby every true believer 'seeth Him who is invisible.' It is the ear of the soul, whereby the sinner 'hears the voice of the Son of God and lives'; the palate of the soul (if the expression may be allowed) whereby a believer 'tastes the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come'; the feeling of the soul whereby 'through the power of the Highest overshadowing him' he perceives the Presence of Him in whom he lives and moves and has his being, and feels the love of God shed abroad in his heart. It is the internal evidence of Christianity, a perpetual revelation, equally strong, equally new, through all the centuries which have elapsed since the Incarnation, and passing now, even as it has done from the beginning, directly from God into the believing soul. 'It is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, if thou believest in the Lord Jesus Christ.'" [1]

This definition of faith pleased an intellect at once so philosophical and so critical as that of Coleridge. "I venture," he said, "to avow it as my conviction that either Christian faith is what Wesley here describes, or there is no meaning in the word."

But this faith itself, Wesley held, is wrought by grace, and so is the gift of God.

"Can you give yourself this faith? (asks Wesley). Is it in your power to see, or hear, or taste, or feel God; to raise in yourself any perception of God, or of an invisible world; to open an intercourse between yourself and the world of spirits; to discern either them or Him that created them; to burst the veil that is on your heart, and let in the light of eternity? You know it is not. You not only do not, but cannot (by your own strength), thus believe. The more you labour so to do the more you will be convinced it is the gift of God. His pardoning mercy supposes nothing in us but a sense of mere sin and misery; and to all who see and feel and own their wants, and their utter inability to remove them, God freely gives faith, for the sake of Him 'in whom He is always well pleased.'"

[1] Stevens, p. 331.

The fruits of faith Wesley held to be two great concurrent changes. One is a change of nature in the believing soul itself—the great spiritual miracle of regeneration; the other is a change of relation to the divine law, known as justification, justification being the new standing in the moral universe the act of forgiveness creates. Attending these great changes, their witness and seal, is the grace of the Holy Spirit attesting their existence to the soul itself, and registering it in the consciousness by an endowment of divine peace.

The doctrine of "assurance" through the witness of the Spirit is an integral part of religion. Scripture teaches it; reason demands it; the creeds of all the Christian Churches assert it. It is incredible that when God's love in Christ has established its empire in the believing heart, and sin is forgiven, and all the ties of the spiritual order are restored, that this stupendous change should be unrealised. It is incredible that God should conceal His grace; that it can be His will that His pardoned child should live under the shadow of a lie.

But this gracious truth was, in Wesley's day, one of the lost doctrines of Christianity. It was in the Thirty-nine Articles, but it had faded out of human memory. It was no longer realised, nor even expected, in human experience. It had become a mere incredibility. Its rediscovery and reassertion are part of the great service Methodism has rendered to the general Christian faith. This is what Wesley says of it:—

"I observed, many years ago, that it is hard to find words in the language of men to explain the deep things of God. Indeed, there are none that will adequately express what the Spirit of God works in His children. But perhaps one might say (desiring any who are taught of God to correct, soften, or strengthen the expression), by the 'testimony of the Spirit' I mean an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God; that 'Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given Himself for me,' that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God. After twenty years' further consideration, I see no cause to retract any part of this. Neither do I conceive how any of these expressions may be altered so as to make them more intelligible. Meantime, let it be observed, I do not mean hereby that the Spirit of God

testifies this by any outward voice; no, nor always by an inward voice, although He may do this sometimes. Neither do I suppose that He always applies to the heart (though He often may) one or more texts of Scripture. But He so works upon the soul by His immediate influence, and by a strong, though inexplicable operation, that the stormy wind and troubled waves subside, and there is a sweet calm; the heart resting as in the arms of Jesus, and the sinner being clearly satisfied that all his 'iniquities are forgiven, and his sins covered.'"

Another characteristic doctrine of Methodism is that which bears the highly controversial title of "perfection." Wesley did not like that word, and seldom uses it, but in the doctrine for which it stands he believed profoundly.

Its proclamation, he held, was part of the mission of Methodism, and constitutes the secret of its success. Wherever its witness to the doctrine failed, there followed an instant arrest of all growth. But Wesley's statement of the doctrine is marked by a wise sobriety. He believed in no angelic perfection; in no "perfection," indeed, of any sort which lifted its possessor out of the reach of the limitations and infirmities which are the inevitable conditions under which men live. He was accustomed to define the doctrine in the language of Scripture: it is simply "loving God with all the heart and soul and mind and strength." Wesley believed in this doctrine because the denial of it meant the assertion that God's ideals for human character must for ever remain unattained, and Christ's redemption itself must suffer defeat, even in those who accept it. But Wesley always linked the doctrine to conduct, and insisted that it should be tried by its effect on the conduct, and he sobered with tireless diligence and quenchless good sense the extravagant statements of some of his followers.

Perfect Christians "are not," he says, "free from ignorance, no, nor from mistake. We are no more to expect any man to be infallible than to be omniscient. From infirmities none are perfectly freed till their spirits return to God; neither can we expect, till then, to be wholly freed from temptation; for 'the servant is not above his Master.' But neither in this sense is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no perfection of degrees, none which does not admit of a continual increase."

Sanctification, he thus taught, was the growth of the regenerated character into maturity and completeness; and the measure of that growth is determined by the faith and expectancy of its subject. So, while in ordinary cases it is a gradual process, in a sense, and under certain conditions, it might be instantaneous, though no stage can ever be reached which forbids further increase. And Wesley was never mightier as a preacher than when urging the instant acceptance of his doctrine. Here is an example of the appeals he was accustomed to make:—

"Thou, therefore, look for it every moment. Why not this hour? this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith. And by this token you may surely know whether you seek it by faith or works. If by works, you want something to be done first, before you are sanctified. You think I must first be, or do, thus or thus. Then, you are seeking it by works unto this day. If you seek it by faith, expect it as you are, and expect it now. To deny one of them is to deny them all; to allow one is to allow them all. Do you believe we are sanctified by faith? Be true, then, to your principle, and look for this blessing just as you are, neither better nor worse; as a poor sinner that has nothing to pay, nothing to plead, but 'Christ died.' And if you look for it as you are, then expect it now. Stay for nothing! Why should you? Christ is ready, and He is all you want. He is waiting for you! He is at the door."

There is no need to dwell further on Wesley's theology. It is to be seen, to-day, under every sky, crystallised into a great Church system—one of the most energetic and influential forms of Protestant Christianity the world knows. And no one who studies with a dispassionate mind Wesley's theology can fail to see that it is a system which puts in true and striking perspective all the great doctrines of evangelical Christianity. It is a creed of hope for defeated and fallen men; a statement of truth which exactly suits the missionary and the evangelist. And yet in its symmetry, its reasonableness, its agreement with Scripture, and the verification it finds in human consciousness, it is a creed to satisfy the philosopher. And the explanation of it lies in the fact that it is intensely and supremely evangelical. It presents religion

not as a scheme of ethics merely, but as a divine deliverance. And the ethics do not precede the deliverance and earn it; they follow it and are created by it.

It may be added that the secret of that curious doctrinal peace which marks the history of Methodism lies exactly at this point. The enduring controversies which have torn asunder the Christian Church lie in what may be called the realm of metaphysical theology. The mere recital of the great historic heresies will show this. And the working theology of Methodism, since it is supremely occupied with a great cluster of evangelical doctrines, has escaped these controversies.

But if Methodism is always supremely evangelical in its teaching, it is also intensely practical, and wisely sober. Its note is a certain equipoise and sanity; an abhorrence of exaggeration. Its theology keeps its feet on the solid earth. Its creed is always related to conduct; is valued as it produces conduct; is tried by its effect on conduct.

Through the whole of Wesley's theology runs this characteristic note of equipoise betwixt ill-balanced extremes. The one great doctrinal controversy of Wesley's life, for example, related to Calvinism. It is undeniable that in salvation there are two factors, the Divine will and man's will. Religion consists in their harmony; heaven must be found in their eternal union. When the human will keeps time, time, time in a golden eternal music, with the Divine will, so that the soul loves what God loves, and hates what God hates, then all God's ideals about man are realised. Now, Calvinism, as Whitefield at least held it, lost sight of that strange, perilous, yet most sublime thing in man—the root of all morality, and without which moral choice is impossible—a free, self-determining will. It put so much emphasis on the Divine will, that the human will disappeared. But Wesley saw both factors. He taught his Church to see and affirm both. And his Arminianism, while it affirms the dignity and freedom of man's will, gives its just place to God's will in all the processes of salvation.

Or take again that doctrine of "perfection" which has often been the reproach of Methodism, and is certainly its characteristic. The question here is, What is the ultimate ideal of religion; the ideal capable of being realised

in human experience? There are two opposite schools of thought—the moralist on one side, who conceives religion as the perfection of outward conduct; and the mystic on the other side, who separates religion from conduct, or resolves it into a sort of Hindoo ecstasy. Wesley held a mid course betwixt these two extremes. As against the moralist, he held that religion is something more than a scheme of mechanical ethics. It is something more than even "morality touched with emotion." It is a Divine deliverance! It is the entrance of supernatural forces into human character; a miracle of grace that lifts the human soul again to that place in the spiritual order from which sin has cast it.

But Wesley shunned the opposite extreme. He had a wise and profound dread of quietism. He defined perfection always, and with restrained sobriety, in the actual words of Scripture. It is simply "loving God with all the heart and soul and mind and strength." And he rigorously tested the doctrine in those who claimed to have realised it by its effect on the conduct.

In things ceremonial, again, Wesley, in exactly the same way, shunned the falsehood of extremes. His teaching as to baptism may be taken as an example of this wise sobriety. There are three known modes of administering the rite of baptism, and over-emphasis on any one of them is the water-mark of the ritualist. And evangelicalism, it may be added, has its ritualists, as rigid in form, and not seldom as acrid in temper, as sacerdotalism itself. Wesley made no choice betwixt these rival modes. He held, and taught his Church to hold, the wise doctrine that all three modes are legitimate, and no one of them is imperative.

Methodism has produced two great theologians, Richard Watson and William Burt Pope. In many respects they are utterly unlike each other. Watson is inferior to Pope in scholarship and literary gifts. He knew little, for example, of the relation of human creeds to each other. The science of comparative theology was not yet born when Watson wrote. Yet, what sensible Methodist would not be willing to have the creed of his Church judged by Watson's fine and luminous definitions?

Pope, on the other hand, had the garnered knowledge

of a great scholar, with a strain of philosophical genius added, rare amongst theologians; and he keeps always in clear vision what may be called the inter-relations of human belief. But both writers have the characteristic note of Methodism; its wise sobriety; its intense evangelicalism, which yet shuns the characteristic perils of evangelicalism. It is a theology which links doctrine to conduct. It abhors fanaticism. It has the salt of reality. Here are doctrines realised in human experience and tested by that experience.

Methodism, as we have seen, puts a mood of the conscience, and not any doctrinal belief, as a condition of membership. But every Church must have a doctrinal test for its teachers, and the doctrinal tests of the Methodist ministry are characteristic. They consist of: (1) Wesley's Notes on the New Testament; (2) his Fifty-three Sermons. No other Church has doctrinal tests of this type; yet they unconsciously, but most happily, reflect the peculiar genius of Methodism. Its theology is rooted directly in Scripture. The Bible, as a standard of doctrine, is assessed in very unlike terms by different Churches. Romanism puts the Church above the Bible. The Church, it claims, is older than the Bible and greater. She is its guardian and interpreter. What the Bible means is only made articulate to human ears, and authoritative for the human conscience, by the voice of the Church. It is a dead book: she is a living entity. The sacerdotalist puts tradition beside the Bible as of equal authority.

Now Methodism is committed to no special theory as to the inspiration of Scripture; but it accepts the Bible as the one source of divine knowledge and the supreme test of all theology. Wesley, in a memorable passage, explains why he is *homo unius libri*, and the passage expresses the whole attitude of his Church towards the Bible:—

"I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God. Just hovering over the great gulf till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach

the way; for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a Book. Oh give me that Book! At any price, give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri.* Here, then, I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone. Only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His Book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark and intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights: 'Lord, is it not Thy word, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God"? Thou 'givest liberally, and upbraidest not.' Thou hast said, 'If any be willing to do Thy will, he shall know.' I am willing to do; let me know Thy will.' I, then, search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, 'comparing spiritual things with spiritual.' I meditate thereon with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach."

Wesley's "Notes on the New Testament" is not, perhaps, a book for scholars; it is more fitted for hours of devotion than for study. It does not shine with ingenious subtleties of exposition, and it has no pretence to original research. It was written before the Higher Criticism was born, and written at high pressure, during a brief interval, when Wesley was resting on account of sickness. But it has a certain flavour of masculine sense and healthy-minded reality which makes it a very nourishing bit of expository literature. Its spirit reflects the reverence, the simplicity of faith, the solemn and almost passionate earnestness of the fine sentences about the Bible we have quoted. And that this book is one of the two doctrinal tests by which Methodism under all skies judges its ministry, shows what is its attitude towards the Word of God.

The second of the doctrinal tests of Methodism, the Fifty-three Sermons, is also happily characteristic. Here we have truth, not drawn out into metaphysical definitions and addressed to the intellect, but translated into practical terms. It is truth as it appeals to the conscience and affects conduct; truth clothed in forms intended to instantly influence conduct.

# CHAPTER XIII

## METHODISM AS A POLITY

UNDERLYING the polity as well as the theology of Methodism is a real but sometimes forgotten philosophy. Looked at as a history, Methodism is an evolution, in which each step is an inevitable stage in a vital process. Regarded as a system, it is a living organism, in which each part is the necessary complement of every other part.

Wesley himself explains what may be called the philosophy of Methodist history by saying that "everything arose just as the occasion required." In those quiet syllables is expressed what, as we look back upon it, is seen to be one of the clearest processes of scientific evolution known to ecclesiastical history. Who studies that evolution will see that, always, the facts not only create the machinery, they make it inevitable. And any failure to meet the new facts as they arose with adequate organisation would have arrested, and perhaps have defeated, the whole movement. The story of Methodism is a drama in which no human being, not even Wesley himself, is consciously shaping events. The shaping force is greater than any human will, and wiser than any human sagacity. And not merely does the scale of the events outrun the vision of the chief actors in them, the order of those events seems to be independent of their purpose.

Let Wesley's life, after his conversion, be set in historic perspective. He had a new message for England. He taught, it is true, the "plain old doctrines of the Church of England," but he proclaimed them with a change of emphasis, and with a note of reality and of urgency, which startled the drowsy clergy of that day. He talked what sounded in their ears an unknown and disquieting language. He becomes for them a challenge

and a test. As a result the church doors are shut against him. He must be silent, or find a new arena and new audiences. So came field-preaching, and Wesley and his comrades proclaimed their message to vast crowds under the arched skies and in the free air. With that fact a new ecclesiastical world comes into existence.

The fast multiplying converts soon make imperative an organisation for their oversight and nurture. Wesley takes a bit of machinery already in existence, and groups his converts into societies. The societies must have meeting-places. These at first are rooms; the rooms grow into chapels. All this means the raising and expending of much money. Then, as now, Methodism found the strength of its finances, not in the splendid gifts of the rich, but in the ungrudged if scanty gifts of the poor; and there must be some organisation for collecting their pence.

The story is classic how, out of this financial necessity, rose the greatest institution in Methodism—the class-meeting, and its most valued order of workers—the class-leaders. Wesley, quick-eyed to see the possibilities of things, writes in his Journal, "This was the very thing we wanted." He put his converts in groups under leaders, who at first visited the members in their charge at their own houses. Later, and for greater convenience, the groups gathered in little meetings. So arose the Methodist class-meeting; and with it came into existence what the class-meeting represents—the lay pastorate of Methodism—its "leaders."

Already, too, the great twin feature of Methodism, an order of lay preachers, had been created by the necessities of the work. Wesley and his comrades must have helpers, who sometimes shared their travels, but more frequently remained behind to take charge of the converts while the leaders moved on to new fields. These "helpers" at first were allowed only to expound the Scripture; but it passes human wit to tell where "exposition" ceases and "preaching" begins. The "helpers" inevitably became preachers; and, like their great leader, they were itinerants. And the itinerancy profoundly colours the whole Methodist ministry. Its ministers are more than an order. They are a brotherhood—a brotherhood with something of a

pilgrim and militant note in it. How deeply the law of celibacy affects the Romish priesthood every one knows; and the law of the itinerancy affects the ministry of the Methodist Church almost as powerfully. And the other two great characteristics of the Methodist Church, the lay ministry and the lay pastorate, are the correlatives of the itinerancy. Without an itinerant ministry they would not be needed; without them an itinerant ministry would not be possible.

The societies were presently grouped for purpose of oversight and government into clusters called circuits. Each branch of Methodism had already evolved its special officers. The classes required leaders, and the leaders naturally crystallised into the leaders' meeting, the spiritual court which watches over the discipline of the membership. The chapels were vested in trustees; so came the Trustee meetings—the business machinery dealing with church property. The societies needed stewards to take charge of their finances. A combination of all the stewards, leaders, &c., in the bounds of any circuit formed the Quarterly meeting, perhaps the most effective instrument for the transaction of the business affairs of a group of churches yet discovered.

The multiplying circuits scattered over the area of the three kingdoms needed some central organisation, and this was found in the Conference. Wesley's first Conference in 1744 consisted merely, as we have seen, of six clergymen, who invited four lay helpers to join them; and these consulted together as to the teaching and policy of the new movement. For forty years the Conference was an indeterminate, fluctuating body, dependent on Wesley's will, and meeting only on his summons. But, as was inevitable, it grew in scale and influence; it became definite in structure. It formed in the end the centre of authority for the whole movement of which Wesley was the head. It defined the theology of Methodism, shaped its organisation, directed its policy, enforced its discipline.

Such a court, it was soon realised, must not depend on the accident of Wesley's life, and expire with his death. It must be assured of continued legal existence. So in due course came the famous Deed of Declaration, and

Methodism became what, in the eyes of the law, is a perpetual corporation; but what is, in historic fact, an undying Church.

Meanwhile, and still as in all other details of its history —by the mere compulsion of events—another great question, the administration of the sacraments, had to be settled. That question marks the parting of the ways. It compelled Wesley to take, though late and reluctantly, the steps which completed the equipment of Methodism. He broke through the church order which so long fettered his hands. He first permitted the celebration of the sacrament in unconsecrated buildings. And it was Charles Wesley, the most obstinate of High Churchmen, who led the way in administering the Lord's Supper in unconsecrated places; and with a flash of what was in him unusual, common-sense, he declared he would administer the ordinance, not only in an unconsecrated house, but in the midst of a wood, rather than leave the new converts without the means of obeying Christ's command. Later, Wesley himself ordained some of his helpers for the purpose of administering the sacraments; but he did this only when the failure of his helpers amongst the Anglican clergy made this necessary; and he did it in each field, in turn, as the necessity became urgent—first in America, then in Scotland, then in Ireland and the West Indies, last of all in England.

Who can look back on this whole process without seeing that it is an evolution, orderly, inevitable, scientific; the growth of a living organism with all its parts in vital and necessary relation to each other? For life has no superfluities.

If the ecclesiastical form of Methodism, as it actually exists full grown, be considered, one great and characteristic feature at once becomes visible. It represents a curiously complete and wise equipoise of forces. The constant peril of all church systems lies at the opposite extremes of clerical despotism, and of an unregulated lay democracy. The Church of Rome, with its priestly rule, its exaggeration of ministerial authority, represents one extreme. Plymouth Brethrenism, which practically denies the existence of any ministerial office at all, represents the other extreme.

Now, Methodism might easily have become a despotism. Its history, indeed, seemed to almost make that inevitable. Wesley might have played the part of another Ignatius Loyola to his societies, and have set up in them, and over them, an autocracy as absolute as that which is crystallised into tyranny in the Order of Jesus. If Wesley had been as Southey, contemplating him through a distorted medium, imagined him to be, consumed with a love of power, he might have made himself a despot with ampler justification for his despotism than most other historical characters possess. History, indeed—to say nothing of human nature—was on the side of that probability. But the grace of God saved Wesley from the blunder, and Wesley's Church from the disaster, of a despotism. Methodism is neither a despotism nor a democracy. It does not exaggerate the claims of the ministerial office; but it does not forget that such an office exists. Its system, we repeat, though it is not always and sufficiently recognised, is that of a wise balance of forces.

Wesley has been described as the discoverer of the possibilities of the layman in the modern Church, and it is certain that no other Church draws its laymen into franker partnership in all its affairs than does the Church Wesley founded. It shares its pastoral office with the leaders, its preaching office with the local preachers. In all its church courts, from the Quarterly meeting to the Conference, where the business affairs of the Church are dealt with, laymen sit with ministers in equal numbers, and with equal, if not identical, powers. Yet Methodism is no more a lay democracy than it is a clerical despotism. Through all its courts, and in all its work, there is an almost unconscious balance maintained betwixt these two extremes.

The minister alone, for example, has the right to admit members into the Church; but the leaders' meeting, a lay court, has the right of veto on that admission. All the lay officers in the Church are elective; but the minister nominates candidates for election. He nominates a leader, but the Leaders' meeting elects. He nominates a steward, but the Quarterly meeting must elect. He nominates a candidate for the ministry; but his nomination is only a proposal; it must be sustained by the votes

of the Quarterly meeting. And so a lay court keeps the key of the pulpit. Speaking generally, no officer can be appointed without the consent of the Church court; but the Church court does not elect without the nomination of the minister.

It is not a question of "orders," but of order. The minister's nomination is a *primâ facie* guarantee of fitness in the candidate; it is a guard against the rise of parties, the rush of unfit, if not self-proposed, candidates, the arts and the passions of contested elections. There is no direct and independent election to any office by, say, the general body of church members; for this would turn the Church into a democracy, with the characteristic risks of democracy. But there is no independent appointment to any office by a minister; for this would set up in the Church a clerical autocracy. And Methodism is equally remote from both these extremes. Office in its system is not a reflex of the wish of mere numbers; that would justify direct election by the whole body of members. This is the method of democracy, and Methodism is not a democracy. Office in the Methodist Church represents duties to be discharged—the duty of a leader, of a local preacher, of a steward; and the nomination of the minister is simply a declaration on the part of the responsible pastor of the church that the person named is fitted to discharge that duty. But the minister cannot of his own act appoint.

An attempt is not seldom made to graft on Methodism some supposed "reform" which is alien to its genius; and the attempt, if it succeeds, never fails to bring disaster. Who studies the history of the divisions which, since Wesley's time, have broken Methodism asunder, or of the strifes which have arrested its progress, will see that they have arisen, never on any question of doctrine, but always over questions of polity. And in every case the cause of the trouble has been the loss of that equipoise which is the characteristic feature of Methodism, as a polity, and the secret of its peace and its vigour. The forces which make for democratic methods, or for the unchecked rule of the ministers, have for the moment obtained the ascendency, and the balance of forces has been lost. For Methodism, it must always be remembered, is as far re-

moved from the priestly sway of Romanism as it is from the structureless disorder of Plymouth Brethrenism. It holds to the pastoral office, but does not exaggerate its claims. It gives laymen the frankest partnership in both the spiritual work and the financial management of the Church; but it does not sacrifice order, and ignore facts, by obliterating all diversities of function betwixt the layman and the minister.

# BOOK V

## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

To

Miss Bolton

In Witney

Oxfordshire

May 13th 74

Now you write Cook like a Woman of Business. They commonly leave out the I & say "Shall come Shall do so": not I shall.

Glasgow
May 13. 1774

My Dear Sister

You give me a pleasing account of the work of God, wch seems to be breaking out at Fairstock. It is probable, you was sent thither for this: Redeem the time: Buy up every opportunity. And never be discouraged, altho many fair Blossoms wch fall off, never ripen into fruit. How gladly wd I pay you a visit there! But I know not how I can do it this Summer: Unless I was to miss Bristol, & come directly from Cheltenham. But I will say no more of it yet: I hope to hear from you again & again before that time

Take care, you do not forget your Witness! Be mindful of your Eldest Care! I am not content, that you should be pitched down to any one place. That is not your Calling. Methinks I want you to be (like me) here, & there & every where. O what a deal of work has our Lord to do in the earth! And may we, be workers together with Him!

"What mighty wonders Love performs,
That puts such Dignity on Worms!"

Don't forget me! I think for love you better, than

My Dear Nancy,

Yours affectionately

J Wesley

London: Published by Smith, Elder, & Co., 15 Waterloo Place, S.W.

# CHAPTER I

## WESLEY'S PERSONALITY

"A CLEAR, smooth forehead, an aquiline nose, an eye the brightest and the most piercing that can be conceived, and a freshness of complexion, scarcely ever to be found at his years, and expressive of the most perfect health. In his countenance and demeanour, there was a cheerfulness mingled with gravity; a sprightliness, which was the natural result of an unusual flow of spirits. His aspect, particularly in profile, had a strong character of acuteness and penetration. . . . A narrow, plaited stock, a coat with small upright collar, no buckles at his knees, no silk or velvet in any part of his apparel, and a head as white as snow, gave an idea of something primitive and apostolical; while an air of neatness and cleanliness diffused over his whole person."

This is the figure of Wesley as seen by the eyes of his contemporaries, and it was the best known figure in the three kingdoms during the last half of the eighteenth century. Yet in this little, alert, compact figure, with its air of old-maidish neatness, dwelt—as the story we have told proves—a calm intensity of energy which has been rarely paralleled in any generation. In range, speed, intensity, and effectiveness Wesley must always remain one of the greatest workers known to mankind. He seemed to live many lives in one, and each life was of amazing fulness. He preached more sermons, travelled more miles, published more books, wrote more letters, built more churches, waged more controversies, and influenced more lives than any other man in English history. And through it all, as he himself, in a humorous paradox, puts it, "he had no time to be in a hurry!"

Lord Rosebery describes Cromwell as "a practical mystic, the most formidable and terrible of all combinations." And Wesley was exactly that "most formidable and terrible of all combinations," a practical mystic. His life thrilled with forces which streamed upon him

from spiritual realms; and yet he kept his feet on the solid earth and had the keenest vision for the facts of earth. He knew how to bring to the service of far-off and invisible ideals the practical sense, the knowledge of men, the faculty of adjusting means to ends, of choosing fit instruments and shaping effective methods, which are the characteristics of a great soldier, or of a successful captain of industry. And it is in this combination of the spiritual with the practical, of ends which belong to the moral order with methods which are effective in the earthly realm; this wedlock of unlike qualities—of ice and of fire, of calmness and of intensity, of serene composure and of demonic energy—that the secret of Wesley's power lies.

No man ever moved more quickly, and none was ever less in a hurry than he. There was something of the inexorable and unhurrying swiftness of a planet about him; and something, too, of its shattering impact. And yet a strange air of repose—of the quiet which is born of problems solved, and of victory attained—lay upon him. There are certain qualities of character which draw other men to their possessor as the moon draws the tides, and sway them, as the winds sway the forest. Who possesses these qualities is inevitably, and by gift of nature, a leader of men. And Wesley had precisely these qualities. But he had them not so much by any endowment of nature as by spiritual creation. He carried with him everywhere —after his conversion—a certain serenity of courage, in the presence of which fear grew ashamed of itself; a certain swiftness of will, a strength of immovable resolution when once conscience had spoken and duty had become clear, which made crowds, with the instinct of crowds for a true leader, follow him without question.

Wesley had ideals beyond the reach of other men's vision, but absolutely clear to himself. He trod with an assured step; he spoke as one who knew. He was absolutely emptied of selfishness. So he became for those about him, in a sense, an embodied conscience. Here was one human spirit, at least, utterly given up to divine things; one human soul in which religion had fulfilled all its offices. And with all his radiant cheerfulness there was something of the unconscious loftiness of Alpine

peaks about him; a remoteness—as though caught from some purer air—from the pursuits and desires of ordinary men. His very face was a rebuke to all mean things. When he came to a town the crowds gathered about him in the street; the little, compact, erect figure standing perhaps on a table brought from some cottage at hand. His look, his speech, the atmosphere he brought with him, his accent both of certainty and authority, the ideals by which he tried himself and others, the perspective in which he saw things, and made other men see them—it was for a moment as if a messenger who belonged to another spiritual order stood amongst men! Then he went on his swift way, and men felt as if some spiritual presence had left them. Contact with him was a spiritual education.

And yet there was nothing of chilly remoteness, of monkish austerity, about Wesley. After his conversion, at least, no human being less like a monk could well be imagined. A sort of perpetual radiance shone in him, and streamed from him. Alexander Knox, who knew Wesley well and judged him coolly, dwells in astonished admiration on his unclouded cheerfulness. "My acquaintance with him," he says, "has done more to teach me what a heaven upon earth is implied in the maturity of Christian piety than I have elsewhere seen or heard or read." His countenance and conversation expressed an habitual gaiety of heart. Wesley himself declared that "he had not felt lowness of spirits one quarter of an hour in his life. Ten thousand cares were no more weight to his mind than ten thousand hairs to his head."

Perhaps in writing those words—words which may well fill ordinary men with despairing envy—Wesley's memory was coloured by the gladness of the moment. He did know moods of depression, and these are reflected again and again in his Journal. But these records only give a more human aspect to Wesley, for they prove that he, too, had a touch of human infirmity. And it is characteristic of him that in each case he cures his own despondency by the medicine of hard work.

Wesley was, to quote Hampson—like Knox, not too friendly a critic—"of exquisite companionable talents." Walsh, that Irish saint amongst Wesley's helpers—a

combination of mystic and genius—discovered even too much humour in Wesley's conversation, and complained to him that, amongst the three or four persons that tempted him to levity, "You, sir, are one, by your witty proverbs." Walsh, however, discovered humour in Wesley probably because he had none of his own. But that Wesley had in the highest degree the gift of clear, keen, wise conversation cannot be doubted. He could have discussed criticism with Pope, politics with Swift, literature with Dr. Johnson, or philosophy with Berkeley, on equal terms—but for one circumstance. He had better things to do! Dr. Johnson, himself a glutton in talk, complained to Patty Wesley of her brother: "I hate to meet John Wesley," he said. "The dog enchants you with his conversation, and then breaks away to go and visit some old woman."

But for Wesley, the "old woman" represented duty. She was an immortal spirit, as precious in the sight of God as Dr. Johnson himself. If Christ valued her enough to die for her, then, as Wesley's conscience told him, he might well value her enough to sacrifice ease that he might go and comfort her. "I find time to visit the sick and the poor," Wesley was accustomed to say, "and I must do it if I believe the Bible. These are the marks by which the great Shepherd will know His sheep."

Once, when tempted to linger in a lovely landscape, Wesley cried, "I believe there is an eternity, I must arise and go hence;" and those words express the temper of his life. He lived in the spirit of Andrew Marvel's strong lines:—

> "Ever at my back I hear
> Time's winged chariots hurrying near."

And this, Johnson complained, "is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have his talk out as I do."

For all this, it may be repeated, there was no touch of the ascetic in Wesley. He did not understand children, as his Kingswood experiment proves, but he loved them and had the art of winning their love. And he stamped these qualities on his helpers. "Spend an hour a week with the children in every large town"—was his rule for

them—"whether you like it or not. Talk with them every time you see any at home. Pray in earnest for them." Wesley did not, again, understand women, as his love affairs abundantly show. But no other man in the England of that day had so many friendships with saintly and noble women as he.

Wesley's limitations were bred of his very virtues. His life was governed by a relentless method. This, applied to his body, made it the toughest bit of human flesh and blood that walked English soil in those days. Applied to his work, it enabled him to accomplish a volume of business which yet makes him the rebuke and despair of all other workers. There is something almost amusing in the unsparing discipline he applied to his own body, until his appetites became the most docile servants that ever obeyed a human will. He made, as his brother Samuel complained, almost a sin of abstinence. The method he took to ascertain with how little sleep his body could be kept in effective working order is amusing. He tells the tale thus:—

"If any one desires to know exactly what quantity of sleep his own constitution requires, he may very easily make the experiment which I made about fifty years ago. I then waked every night about twelve or one, and lay awake for some time. I readily concluded that this arose from my being in bed longer than nature required. To be satisfied, I procured an alarm, which waked me the next morning at seven (near an hour earlier than I rose the day before), yet I lay awake again at night. The second morning I rose at six; but notwithstanding this, I lay awake the second night. The third morning I rose at five; but, nevertheless, I lay awake the third night. The fourth morning I rose at four, as, by the grace of God, I have done ever since. And I lay awake no more. And I do not now lie awake, taking the year round, a quarter of an hour together in a month. By the same experiment, rising earlier and earlier every morning, may any one find how much sleep he really wants."

No human soul, in a word, ever got more out of the body it inhabited than Wesley did out of his. His economy of time and sleep and food extended to everything else. He wasted, says one of his biographers, not even so much as a sheet of paper His moments were measured out as an anxious chemist weighs out his drugs,

and assigned—as if in scruples and drachms—to various duties. He had a fixed hour for every purpose, and no company, no conversation, no pleasure was permitted to vary, by a hair's-breadth, the inflexible order of his life. He wrote, he travelled, he visited the sick, he did everything in certain hours; and those hours were inviolable.

But the iron resolution with which Wesley mapped out the use of every faculty, the discharge of every duty, the employment of every moment of time, had its disadvantages. It made him, from some aspects, a machine. It gave him no time for friendships. Domestic life under such unyielding conditions became impossible. His wife had a genius for making herself and those about her miserable, and under any environment would have succeeded in being unhappy. But Wesley, as a husband, might have sorely tried the patience of any wife. She must have found herself dismissed to one tiny compartment of his many-celled life. And even a woman of generous and self-sacrificing temper might well have found the experience too heroic.

It is a mistake, of course, to think that Wesley was in a semi-miraculous way exempt from ill health of every sort. He suffered from hereditary gout, the disease of which his mother died. He underwent a serious surgical operation in 1764; in 1789 he had an attack of diabetes. The strain of his work was interrupted again and again by illness. He had, as a matter of fact, sufficient hints of physical weakness to have justified a man of less heroic spirit nursing himself into a state of soft-fibred indolence.

Beside his Journal, Wesley kept a diary, a little book which he carried continually with him, and in which he noted in shorthand his hour of rising, what he read or wrote till breakfast, and the exact use to which every moment of the day was turned. On the first page of each of these little books he always wrote the following sentences: "I resolve, *Deo juvante*, (1) To devote an hour morning and evening to private prayer, no pretence or excuse whatsoever; (2) To converse *κατὰ Θεόν*, no lightness, no *εὐτραπελία*." How Wesley, with so tremendous a volume of work poured into his waking moments, could devote an hour morning and evening to private prayer is almost unintelligible. But he did it, and all the other

hours of the day took calmness, serenity, strength from those two sacred hours which marked their boundaries. But that phrase, "no pretence, no excuse whatsoever," is characteristic of Wesley. All his purposes had that note of supreme resolution. Other things must yield to them. His own plans were for him a categorical imperative.

Few men, again, have ever been more systematically generous than Wesley. He lived with the utmost economy himself, and gave away the whole surplus of his income. As he tells the story: "When he had thirty pounds a year, he lived on twenty-eight, and gave away two. The next year, receiving sixty pounds, he still lived on twenty-eight, and gave away two-and-thirty. The third year he received ninety pounds, and gave away sixty-two. The fourth year he received a hundred and twenty pounds. Still he lived on twenty-eight, and gave to the poor ninety-two." But Hampson says, with a certain degree of truth, "his charities seem to have been rather the result of a sense of duty than of any tenderness of nature."

Wesley's preaching, no doubt, suffered from his overcrowded habit of life. He was accustomed to say he could preach three or four times a day without any trouble, and he acted on that theory—with the result that he often preached with insufficient preparation, and with less effect than he might have done. Hampson says that when he gave himself sufficient time for study he succeeded, and when he did not he frequently failed. "He was sometimes flat and insipid. He often appeared in the pulpit thoroughly exhausted with labour and want of rest, but wherever he was he made it a point to preach if he could stand upon his legs." Hampson adds the curious remark that whenever Wesley "fell into anecdote and story-telling" his sermon was a failure. What is a resource to ordinary men was to Wesley fatal! "We have scarcely ever," he says, "heard from him a tolerable sermon in which a story was introduced."

Wesley's literary work, again, suffered in the same way from haste and inadequate opportunity. He was a tireless and omnivorous reader, and he read under conditions which to other men would have made reading impossible. He was a poor rider, almost as poor as Napoleon; though, unlike Napoleon, he did not require

wooden steps by which to mount his horse. Wesley on horseback was the best-known figure on all the roads of the three kingdoms of that day. It was the figure of a man in haste; great duties behind him just discharged, and great duties still beckoning him in front. And betwixt duty finished and duty beckoning, he went, book in hand, and read as he went. With the reins lying loose on his horse's neck, and his hands grasping a volume held up to his eyes, he would ride fifty or sixty miles a day. In this fashion he rode on an average 4500 miles every year, and did it for over fifty years. During those fifty years he preached more than forty thousand times, to all sorts of audiences, under all sorts of conditions. No other man in history, except perhaps Whitefield, was so familiar with the faces of a crowd, spent so much time amongst crowds, or understood so completely their moods. But who beside Wesley ever turned the saddle, and the open road, and the changing English skies, into a permanent study!

But his reading had, as was inevitable, the vice of haste. It bred swift and hurried judgments, born of half knowledge. When Wesley dismounted, at the close of the day, or at night, when the last lingering hearers had left him, he would record in his Journal, in his curious shorthand, all the hasty recollections and judgments of the day. So his Journals are packed with the queerest *obiter dicta;* judgments on men, events, and books; sentences which represent, not large knowledge and reflection, but only the momentary impulse of his feeling, or of his prejudices, born of the swift and broken glance at the pages of a book as he jolted over some rough country road.

Much of Wesley's literary work, done under such conditions, shows marks of inadequate care. He was never a writer at leisure. He scorned attempts at style. To say what he wanted in the shortest words, and in the shortest sentences, was his ideal. And there is very much to be said for his ideal. In literature, as in mathematics, a straight line is the shortest distance betwixt two points. Wesley, at least, never thought in curves, and never wrote in spirals. But much of his writing is marred by visible hurry.

It must be remembered, too, that his books, when they

were not controversial accidents, were written for the constituency of his own followers—a great, docile, untaught multitude, who had towards Wesley a dumb and filial reverence, and for whom Wesley had the protecting concern of a father. He would put all literature within their reach; and to do it he must translate it into their language. So he was for ever condensing, abridging, and publishing books for his people. But his methods were hurried. To quote Hampson, "he just looked over his author and drew his pen across the passages he disapproved, and this with so little accuracy that he frequently left sentences directly contrary to his own principles." Wesley read and wrote, indeed, with such an heroic economy of time that he sometimes not only forgot what he had read and what he had written, but what he had recommended! The one serious literary scandal which befell him, his reproduction of Dr. Johnson's pamphlet on the American Revolution, was due to this.

Wesley had an almost rash frankness. He could not always keep the secrets of other people, and he could never keep his own. To one who complained of his brother's want of reticence, Charles Wesley replied, "You expect he will keep his own secrets? Let me whisper it in your ears: he never could do it since he was born! It is a gift that God has not given him." "My brother," said Charles on another occasion, in disgusted accents, "was, I believe, born for the benefit of knaves." He was of the sweetest possible temper; he forgave easily, generously, completely—and perhaps too often! When aroused, he was a man of keenest penetration, with a gift for speech which bit like the stroke of a whip, or cut like the edge of a sword-blade. And yet there was in his character a vein of simplest generosity, which made him almost gullible! His sweetness of temper sometimes permitted ignoble men to have a place about him they did not deserve. Hampson says that he "had no attachments that partook of the genius of friendship"; but that is certainly untrue. He clung, not seldom with an overpatient fidelity, to his friends. And it was inevitable that round a figure so strong, so sweet, a character of such charm and power, strange crowds gathered. The earnest wanted a leader. The weak came to lean on him, the timid

to catch the infection of his courage, the selfish to profit by his influence. And Wesley had not the critical eyes of his brother Charles. He chose his greater comrades nobly—Fletcher, Coke, and many another; but he tolerated spirits about him less lofty than these, and his shrewder brother Charles looked on these with unfriendly eyes. "Are you one of my brother's favourites," he inquired once of a certain person, and on receiving the reply that he was not, Charles said bluntly, "I do not like you the worse for that." "It signifies nothing," Charles complained to his brother once, "to tell you anything; for whom you love once you will love on through thick and thin."

But this fine generosity on the part of Wesley, we repeat, had its risks. There gathered round him in his latter days a group of followers almost too docile. They reflected all his habits. They copied his gestures, his dress, his accents, his prejudices. "If he left off tea, which he did in 1742," says Hampson, "they did the same. If he lay upon boards, or lived on vegetables, they did so too; and because he was fond of morning preaching, they observed the practice, at five in the morning, winter and summer, though, very often, they could scarcely collect half-a-dozen hearers. Some imitated his handwriting, and so exactly copied his style and manner of speaking, that the difference was almost imperceptible."

All this inevitably strengthened the masterful note in Wesley's character. He became, in his latter days, less patient of argument, less tolerant of any judgment which clashed with his own. He was reluctant to hear reasons intended to change a purpose on which he had set his mind. "When anything was proposed," says Hampson, "which he disapproved, or any attempt to go into a debate of his favourite doctrines, it was common with him to tell a story or give out a hymn to put an end to the conversation." Men of strong will and independent judgment came to resent this; and thus in his later years Wesley drew close to himself those who opposed the least resistance to his own opinions and plans.

Coleridge denies to Wesley the philosophic mind; Isaac Taylor says he had no touch of intuitional genius; he had only the logical intellect, &c. It is not quite clear what this tangle of phrases means. Wesley's work was not to

spin out philosophical reflections, or to write volumes of abstract dissertations. He lived in a real world; he dealt with men and women, with human passions and sorrows, with the tragedies of human life, and the problems of the human soul. He did the work of a preacher, of an administrator, of a statesman. All his energies were in close and constant relation to the everyday facts of human life. And the fruits of his life are not to be sought in a library, or measured by printed pages. They are to be found in history. Their imperishable record is in human lives.

That he had some touch of creative genius is proved by the great and living Churches which to-day bear his name. The re-birth of the Christian religion in English history is directly traceable to John Wesley. And what monument built to statesman or soldier, to poet or inventor or discoverer, can compare with a memorial like this!

## CHAPTER II

### WESLEY'S LOVE AFFAIRS

All Wesley's love affairs were disasters, but his marriage was a tragedy—a tragedy made only the more complete by a certain ignoble aspect it wears. Yet both for the light it sheds on his character, and as a factor in his life, the story of that marriage has to be told.

On the subject of marriage generally both the Wesleys held at least semi-monastic views. Wesley published in 1743 a tract, "Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life," which might almost have been written by a convinced and ascetic Roman Catholic. The celibate state, he taught, might not be of imperative and universal obligation, it was certainly a loftier state than that of marriage. Marriage was a concession to human weakness, and ought to be postponed as long as possible in all cases, and forgone absolutely where there was sufficient grace to enable this to be done. When they returned from Georgia, the brothers made a compact, each pledging himself not to marry without the consent of the other.

But nature is stronger than even the most austere sacerdotal theories. It made itself first felt in Charles Wesley. In 1748, when he was over forty years of age, he propounds to his brother as a sort of conundrum, "How know I if it is best for me to marry? Certainly better now than later; and if not now, what security that I shall then? It should be now or not at all." He proceeded in the characteristic Wesley fashion to collect the opinions of all his friends on this subject. His brother's tractate stood in the way. He could hardly flout it publicly. This difficulty, however, was removed by the Conference of 1748 taking the "Thoughts on Marriage" in hand, and convincing its author "that he might be wrong"; that, at least, there was something to be said on the other side of the question. Wesley records: "In

June 1748 we had a Conference in London. Several of our brethren then objected to the 'Thoughts on Marriage,' and, in full and friendly debate, convinced me that a believer might marry without suffering loss in his soul."

This was not a very encouraging decision, but Charles Wesley was willing to take the risk. He fixed his choice on Miss Sally Gwynne. She was a girl of twenty-three, the daughter of a good family, and herself of very fine and attractive qualities. The story of the courtship sheds a curious light on the social habits of the day. Charles Wesley first approached his brother to secure his approval, and discovered to his delight that John was already contemplating matrimony for him. He had, indeed, mentally selected three young ladies, from whom Charles might take his choice, and Miss Gwynne was one of the three. Mrs. Gwynne, the mother of Sally, was then approached. She was the business mind of her household; and while approving of Charles, she discussed the whole matter from a strictly business standpoint.

The details are amusing. It was solemnly conceded, for example, that the bridegroom should be at liberty to "keep up a vegetable diet," and to travel as an evangelist, but not to go to Ireland—a condition which, later, was withdrawn. Charles Wesley, on his part, had to show an income of £100 a year. After some difficulty, John Wesley agreed to give his brother security for £100 a year on the profits of his books; but Mrs. Gwynne rejected this as not being a sufficiently solid asset. She had a practical woman's doubts as to the market value of literature.

Negotiations came to a standstill, till one of Charles Wesley's friends, Perronet, broke in on the proceedings by a letter to the mother of the bride. "If you and worthy Mr. Gwynne are of opinion," he wrote, "that the match proposed by the Rev. Charles Wesley be of God, neither of you will suffer an objection drawn from the world to break it off!" This remonstrance proved effective; Charles Wesley was allowed a brief interval of courtship, interspersed with preaching, and during which he wrote no less than seventeen hymns—principally addressed to the earthly object of his affections; and on April 8, 1749, the marriage took place.

Some unkind critic wrote that it resembled a funeral

rather than a wedding; but gravity of behaviour was the note of a good Methodist in those days. The marriage, as a matter of fact, proved one of singular felicity. His wife, to a very tender and loving spirit, united an almost masculine strength and sanity of judgment. She became the mother of eight children, filled her husband's life with serenest happiness, and outlived him many years, dying at the advanced age of ninety-six. The marriage of at least one of the Wesley household thus proved to be a very happy experiment. As one of its results, however, it changed the character of Charles Wesley's work. He was anchored now in a happy home, his children came fast about him. He could no longer take any wide flight as an itinerating evangelist, and his preaching tours were practically limited henceforth to the roads betwixt London and Bristol.

John Wesley, however, was far less fortunate in his excursions into the realm of sentiment. All his love affairs were blunders, and he ended by selecting what was probably the most absolutely unfit woman in the three kingdoms to be his wife. Such figures as those of Betty Kirkham, of Mrs. Pendarvis—the "Aspasia" of a literary correspondence—and Miss Sophia Hopkey, of Georgia, flit briefly across the landscape of Wesley's life. But the story of a more serious entanglement has to be told.

In August 1748, Wesley, while at Newcastle, suffered one of his rare attacks of illness. It lasted only a few days, and it did not wholly interrupt his preaching; but during its brief continuance he was nursed by Grace Murray, one of the staff of the Orphan House at Newcastle. Now sickness was for Wesley always a period of what may be called matrimonial peril. In health he was too busy, too preoccupied, too eagerly intent on his work, to find time to think of marriage. And it may be added, he seldom stopped long enough in one place to make any acquaintance which could lead to marriage. But when he was sick, he felt the need of a woman's gentle ministration. He had a simple-minded but quixotic faith in the goodness of all women, and seemed always ready to propose to the particular face that at the moment bent over him in his sickness. He was thrice sick: at Georgia, in 1737, where Miss Hopkey nursed him; at Newcastle, in

1748, where Grace Murray nursed him; and in London, in 1751, where Mrs. Vazeille nursed him. And as a matter of fact, Wesley wanted to marry each of his nurses in turn!

Grace Murray was a widow of twenty-eight. She was of Scottish blood; political troubles had brought poverty on her family; and she herself had been at one time a domestic. But many facts make it clear that she was a woman of curious and dangerous charm. Wesley himself gives with prosaic minuteness a catalogue of her qualities:—

"She was remarkably neat; nicely frugal, yet not sordid; gifted with a large amount of common-sense; indefatigably patient, and inexpressibly tender; quick, cleanly, skilful; of an engaging behaviour, and of a mild, sprightly, cheerful and yet serious temper; while, lastly, her gifts for usefulness were such as he (Wesley) had not seen equalled."

The gift of being "inexpressibly tender" had for Wesley's tired mind and body, as he lay sick, a perilous charm; and when Grace Murray's duties as nurse drew to an end he proposed to marry her. She seemed amazed, and said, "This is too great a blessing to me; I cannot tell how to believe it. This is all I could have wished for under heaven!" To marry Wesley would, no doubt, have been for her a great promotion; but, as a matter of fact—though she did not inform Wesley of the circumstance—she was at that moment practically engaged to one of his helpers, John Bennet, whom she had nursed a year before.

The story that follows, if told in a novel as a picture of masculine simplicity, and of feminine caprice, would seem extravagant. It is related with courageous frankness in Tyerman's "Wesley," and there can be no doubt as to the main facts. The story is taken from authentic documents, one of which at least was revised by Wesley himself. It is a curious drama, with an absorbed evangelist as lover; a highly impressionable woman, whom her own sex at least would sharply sum up as an incurable flirt, as the object of his affections; a patient and determined rival, and an interfering brother, as the other actors. Grace Murray proceeded to "run," with equally "inexpressible tenderness," her two lovers; and the mere dates of

the story show with what easy facility she transferred her emotions from one to the other in turn.

A week after proposing marriage, Wesley had to start on a preaching tour; before doing so, he told Grace Murray he was convinced God intended her to be his wife. She thereupon protested that to be left behind was "more than she could bear"; and Wesley took her with him as a helper in his services. When he reached Bennet's circuit, he left Grace Murray behind, quite unconscious of the relations betwixt the pair. Within a week Bennet wrote to Wesley asking his consent to marry Grace Murray, and with his letter came one from the lady herself saying she believed it was the will of God she should marry—not Wesley but—Bennet!

Wesley replied in astonished terms; but he was now absorbed afresh in his work, and he accepted the situation with a magnanimity few men could have shown, and most women would not have admired. The too impressionable Grace Murray, indeed, was not willing that her romance should end so abruptly and so soon. For six months she maintained a correspondence with both men, and persuaded each in turn that she loved him only. She seemed, indeed, to really believe that she belonged to the one whose letter she had last read.

It must be remembered that she was one of the "helpers" employed in Wesley's work, and in February 1749, Wesley, then about to visit Ireland, proposed to take her with him to assist in his services there. She sent Bennet the intelligence, and told him that "if he loved her" he must come to her at once.

Bennet could not come; and Grace Murray told Wesley, with the only flash of frankness she showed in the whole history, how matters stood betwixt her and Bennet. After much discussion, it was agreed that the contract with Bennet was not binding; she belonged to Wesley. Accordingly she accompanied Wesley and took part in his services throughout Ireland.

In August, Bennet and Wesley met at Epworth; and Bennet told Wesley that Grace Murray had sent him all his (Wesley's) letters to her. The feminine conscience, where matters of express and clear duty are concerned, is usually more sensitive than even that of a man; but

that vague, indefinable thing, "a sense of honour," is, for some women, not only a thing unpossessed, but a thing uncomprehended. To give the letters which had been written by one lover, in all the confidence of affection, to a rival was an act of feminine treachery which few men could forgive. To Wesley's stubborn sense of honour, the act must have seemed nothing less than base. It visibly chilled the ardour of his affection for its perpetrator, and perhaps helps to explain his willingness to postpone his marriage with Grace Murray when that lady was eager for it. After this stage the lady is plainly more "willing"—in alternating patches, indeed, after her characteristic fashion—than the gentleman.

But the act, if it proved how odd a sense of honour Grace Murray possessed, at least proved one thing—she loved Bennet! And Wesley decided the pair ought to marry at once, and wrote a brief note to Grace Murray telling her so.

When she received it she ran to Wesley in an agony of tears and begged him "not to talk so unless he designed to kill her." Wesley hesitated; tears on a face he loved were almost irresistible. But he kept to his decision to give her up. She was ill, and sent for him. "How can you think I love any one better than I love you?" she cried. "I love you a thousand times better than I ever loved John Bennet in my life." That same evening, when Bennet in turn came, she promised to be his wife! Was there ever before so active a transfer of affections from one suitor to another!

On September 6 Wesley asked her bluntly, "Which will you choose?" She replied: "I am determined by conscience as well as by inclination to live and die with you." Both Wesley and the lady wrote to Bennet in these terms. Here, at last, the matter was surely settled. Grace Murray urged Wesley to marry her immediately. She understood herself too well not to know the risk of delay! But Wesley, always the most leisurely of lovers, now wished to satisfy John Bennet; to procure his brother's consent; to explain his reasons for marrying to all his preachers and societies, and to desire their prayers; and this process, he calculated, would take "about a year."

Here was a catalogue of delays and uncertainties! The lady agreed to wait, but protested she would wait no longer than a year, and plainly so tedious and circuitous an approach to marriage unsettled her easily transferred affections once more.

The business of satisfying John Bennet proved lengthy, and during its progress Charles Wesley appeared on the scene. It shocked his pride of family that his brother should marry a woman who, it was said, had been a domestic servant; and if Grace Murray had the art of fascinating all men, this was attended, as is usually the case, with the faculty of offending most of her own sex. Her inexpressible tenderness was wasted on *them!* They looked on her with icily critical eyes; and Charles Wesley had poured into his ears many tales from eager feminine lips injurious to his brother's intended bride. He told his brother bluntly that all their preachers would leave them, and all their societies disperse, if he married Grace Murray.

Wesley argued the case out with his brother with a philosophy which was more creditable to his self-control as a man than to his ardour as a lover. He was a logician even when in love; his affections ran in syllogisms; and after retailing to his brother, with scientific detail, the merits of the object of his affections, he summed up his conclusions under two heads: "(1) I have Scriptural reasons to marry; (2) I know no person so proper as this."

Charles departed, having first kissed the intended bride, and saying, "Grace Murray, you have broken my heart." But it turned out that Grace Murray had occasion at that moment to go to Newcastle, and she rode behind Charles to that place. John Bennet was there awaiting their arrival. The impressionable Grace Murray fell at the feet of lover No. 2, acknowledged she had used him ill, begged his forgiveness, and within seven days the pair were married!

A lady, we repeat, very expeditious in her affections. The dates condemn her. On September 6 she was urging Wesley to marry her immediately, and vowing she loved him only. On September 28 she was at John Bennet's feet, entreating his forgiveness, and declaring *he* was the sole object of her too agile regards.

A few days after Charles Wesley, with the newly-married pair, came to John, and a curious scene followed. Whitefield, who had arrived the day previously, and had wept and prayed over Wesley, was present. According to Tyerman, "Charles, with characteristic impetuosity, accosted his brother, saying, 'I renounce all intercourse with you, but what I would have with a heathen man or a publican.' Whitefield and John Nelson burst into tears; prayed, cried, and entreated, till the storm passed over. The brothers, unable to speak, fell on each other's neck. John Bennet was introduced; but instead of upbraiding him, Wesley kissed him. Wesley and his brother had a private interview, and, on hearing explanations, Charles was utterly amazed, exonerated him from blame, and declared that all the culpability was hers."[1]

Wesley was, no doubt, very ill-used in this whole transaction; ill-used by his brother, by Bennet his helper, and by this lady of such very changeable moods. But it is easier to forgive those who have wronged us than those whom we have wronged; and Bennet, within nine months of the marriage, separated from Wesley and carried off with him as many members of the society as he could influence.

Four days after the marriage, Wesley wrote to a friend quoting afresh the verse he quoted some twelve years before, when Miss Hopkey was taken from him—"Son of man, behold, I take from thee the desire of thine eyes at a stroke; yet shalt thou not lament, neither shall thy tears run down." "Yesterday," he adds, "I saw my friend that was, and him to whom she is sacrificed. . . . But why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?"

But Wesley was not a man to nourish resentment; and he had no time to expend in regrets. He forgave the woman who had trifled with him, and the friend who had outwitted him, and the day after the interview described he started on a preaching tour. It was nearly forty years before Grace Murray and John Wesley met again. He was preaching in Moorfields, and she sent him a message, asking him to visit her. He went, spent a few brief

[1] Tyerman, ii. p. 53.

moments with her, and was never afterwards heard to mention her name.

Human nature is compounded of many elements: and the story we have told gives only one side of Grace Murray's character. A brief life, with extracts from her diary, published by her son after her death, shows her to have been a woman capable of deep religious feeling, and with an unusual power of literary expression. There is evidence, too, that she kept a place in the regard of both the Wesleys after her marriage with Bennet, and the curious history which preceded it. Two months after the marriage, in a letter to Bennet, signed "your affectionate brother," dated London, December 7, 1749, and never before published, Wesley says:—

"I wrote my last out of the fulness of my heart, not then perceiving that I should write to you any more. I do not care to write anything fresh on *that* subject. Perhaps I may some time show you the letter I designed for you in times past. I do not see things in the same light as you do; but I complain not. For I am a sinner: therefore it is just that I go warily all my days. Nay, and I believe it is best for me." He adds a significant postscript:—"Poor Grace! You have formerly been a means of many blessings to me. May God prepare you to receive all His blessings in time and in eternity."

Many months later, in a letter to Bennet, dated August 10, 1750, Charles Wesley says: "My heart is with you and yours;" and then he too sends a message to the wife: "Dear Grace! Fear not! In six troubles the Lord has saved you. My partner," he adds, "salutes you in the love that never faileth."

Perhaps the best defence of Grace Murray is supplied by John Wesley himself in "A Narrative of a Remarkable Transaction in the Early Life of John Wesley, from an Original Manuscript in his own Handwriting," published in 1862. Though the evidence for the genuineness of the narrative is not absolute, yet it is strong, and the story as thus told brings out vividly that deep and eager "tenderness" of Grace Murray which was at once her charm and her weakness. Wesley's analysis of her character and of her work as his helper, is written in an exalted key. He declares he "never met or heard of a woman so

owned of God. . . ." His love for Grace Murray, as shown in this narrative, is a slowly kindling fire, but it becomes intense, though always Wesley remained something of the pedant, even when in love. The key to Charles Wesley's fiery opposition to the match is given in a letter headed "My dear Sister and Friend," which Charles Wesley wrote to Grace after the interview in which he said, "Grace Murray, you have broken my heart." In this letter he writes: "The case thus appears to me: you promised J. B. to marry him; since which you engage yourself to another. How is this possible, and who is this other? One of such importance, that his doing so dishonest an action would destroy himself and me, and the whole work of God. . . . What a scandal had you brought on the Gospel! You would have lived to hear your name cursed by God's people."

John Wesley, according to this view, was taking from one of his preachers a woman who was his pledged wife. This was a scandal that explains Charles Wesley's abrupt words to his brother, "I renounce all communication with you, but what I would have with a heathen man or publican." "I felt little emotion," says John Wesley, telling the story, "it was only adding a drop of water to a drowning man, while I calmly accepted his renunciation and acquiesced therein."

To Grace Murray marriage with Wesley was thus described as a crime, which would destroy his work, and she was told that Wesley himself had realised this when she left him. Then the harassed and distressed soul declared, "I will have J. Bennet, if he will have me."

Wesley himself, of course, believed that his engagement to Grace Murray was of an older date and better authority than that she had contracted with Bennet. For this strange tangle of dates and engagements Grace Murray, with her too eager and ready "tenderness," was no doubt responsible; but, as Wesley himself says, "those who know human nature will pity her at least as much as they will blame her."

Wesley's narrative adds one odd incident. After Charles Wesley had carried Grace Murray off and persuaded her that marriage with his brother would be a crime, there yet remained the task of getting Bennet to marry her, for

the message came that "he would now have nothing to do with her." Charles Wesley hereupon left poor Grace with some friends, two miles from Newcastle, and rode forward to interview Bennet. The way he soothed his anger, says John Wesley, "was by laying all the blame upon me, as having used all my art and authority to seduce another man's wife. . . . It was then that Grace Murray was brought to him; she fell at his feet and begged he would forgive her. To satisfy her entirely as to any scruple that might remain, one was brought in to assure that I had given her up and would have nothing to say to her." Wesley tells the story of the interview with Bennet and his newly wedded wife on October 6th. "Oh! what an interview," he writes. "We sat weeping at each other. I asked, 'What did you say to my brother to make him accost me thus?' She fell at my feet, and said she could not speak against me, in many other words to the same effect, in the midst of profound sighs and tears. Before she arose he too (Bennet) fell on his knees for what he had spoken of me. Between them both I knew not what to say or do. I can forgive, but who can redress the wrong?" Wesley ends the narrative with the words, "Hardly has such a case been from the beginning of the world."

Within eighteen months of this period John Wesley met his evil fate, and married. Charles Wesley first met the lady, Mrs. Vazeille, at his friend Perronet's, and describes her as "a woman of sorrowful spirit"; a quality which, later, her unfortunate husband was to discover, merely meant a genius for making herself and everybody about her miserable. She was a widow, some years younger than Wesley, with three children, and a decent income settled upon them. She was, in her own uncomfortable fashion—at this stage, at least—a religious woman, with some capacity for making herself agreeable when she chose. But she was ignorant, of self-indulgent habits, with a semi-lunatic capacity for jealousy.

John Wesley had a child-like simplicity in all matters relating to women. He never allowed for sex. He looked on every woman with undiscerning eyes, and took her at face value. Any one of his sisters might have taught him better. They would have seen at a glance that Miss

Sophie's simple dress, and pious doubts, and zeal as a nurse in Georgia, were but the arts of her sex, intended to capture this young and earnest Fellow of Lincoln, thrown by a strange chance on the shores of Georgia. Grace Murray's "inexpressible tenderness" and Mrs. Vazeille's "sorrowful spirit," in like manner, would have been analysed, discounted, assessed.

To John Wesley, however, every woman was a replica of his mother. It is easy to smile at his simplicity, but it had a generous and noble root.

Wesley was presently introduced by his brother to Mrs. Vazeille. Events moved fast. It was a case of a widow and a middle-aged man who thought he ought to marry, but was too busy to look for a wife. On February 2, Charles Wesley writes: "My brother told me he was resolved to marry." That John should follow his own example seemed to Charles nothing less than a disaster. "I was thunderstruck," he says.

"Trusty Ned Perronet followed, and told me, the person was Mrs. Vazeille! One of whom I had never had the least suspicion. I refused his company to the chapel, and retired to mourn with my faithful Sally. I groaned all the day, and several following ones, under my own and the people's burdens. I could eat no pleasant food, nor preach, nor rest, either by night or by day."[1]

Wesley, this time, was not in the least anxious to consult his friends, or take the opinion of his societies and ask their prayers. Least of all was he disposed to consult his brother Charles. His interference had spoilt one marriage; John would give him no chance of spoiling a second. But a curious incident followed. He records:—

"Met the single men of the London society, and showed them on how many accounts it was good for those who had received that gift from God, to remain 'single for the kingdom of heaven's sake,' unless where a particular case might be an exception to the general rule."

This spectacle of John Wesley some ten days before his own marriage explaining the superiority of the unmarried

[1] Tyerman, ii. p. 104.

condition to one of his societies, is really very puzzling. Through the loophole of this phrase—"a particular case"—Wesley himself was at that moment about to escape from the celibacy he recommended to others!

Wesley had been as near to marriage before without reaching that goal, and it is by no means certain that Mrs. Vazeille would have become Mrs. John Wesley but for one trifling accident. Wesley was about to set out on his northern tour, in which it is probable he would have quite forgotten Mrs. Vazeille; but at this point an accident precipitated matters. It was a bitter frost, and Wesley, crossing London Bridge, slipped on the ice and injured his ankle severely. He tried with invincible courage to preach, but could not, and was taken to Threadneedle Street, where Mrs. Vazeille resided, and was nursed by that lady. This was fatal! Seven days were spent, partly in the task of writing a Hebrew grammar, and composing a set of lessons for children, and partly in "conversation with Mrs. Vazeille," and the business of being nursed by her.

The accident occurred on February 10. On February 17 he was carried to the Foundry, and preached kneeling, not being able to stand. The next day, while he was still a cripple, he married Mrs. Vazeille. He preached again—indomitable man!—still in kneeling attitude, on Tuesday evening, and on Wednesday morning; and a fortnight after his marriage, being able to climb into his saddle, he rode off on a preaching tour.

Wesley's wife lived till 1781, and for those thirty years she was for her unfortunate husband an embodied and ceaseless torment. She accompanied him at first in his preaching tours, but her genius for being discontented, and for quarrelling with everybody about her, brought this to an end. Within a month of the marriage the favourite topic for this remarkable wife was her great husband's faults. Within a year the breach was open, confessed, incurable.

Wesley was, no doubt, a somewhat trying husband. His character and habits were settled; he was incessantly travelling; his life had in it absolutely no privacy. The wife who married Wesley might well have felt as though she were fastened to the tail of a comet. Yet Wesley was

a man of invincible patience, of kindness without limit; and he had in him depths of feeling which a true woman might easily have evoked. But his wife was nothing better than a human gad-fly. Her business in existence was to sting.

Charles Wesley, with a touch of unconscious humour, gives us a hint of this termagant's capacity for quarrelling. "I called," he says, "two minutes before preaching, on Mrs. Wesley at the Foundry, and *in all that time* we had not one quarrel." Charles, indeed, took his brother's wife, with her furies, half humorously. He was accustomed to call her "My Best Friend," because she told him his faults with greater diligence and emphasis than any other human being. Charles was once, however, for a moment pricked out of his philosophy. This scold was accustomed to accuse him of idleness; but in a more malignant fit of temper than usual, she declared that for years his dearest Sally had been his brother's mistress! Charles fairly danced with rage at this slander on his wife, who, on her part, with her serene and invincible good sense, simply smiled and said, "Who will believe my sister now?"

Jealousy is, perhaps, the most malignant and tormenting of all human passions. When inflamed, it is simply a mood of lunacy. And Mrs. Wesley was furiously jealous of her husband. His work set him in the relation of friend and counsellor to many women; amongst his helpers, too, and in the institutions that were springing up under his care, women were employed; and each one was, for his half-insane wife, an object of deadly suspicion. Wesley, on his side, was apt to be tolerant, in a masculine, large-minded way, of facts in relation to such women which other women —even the best—would hardly forgive. Sarah Ryan, for example, the housekeeper at one of his Orphanages, was a woman with "a past." She was at this time only thirty-three; but she had three husbands living, and was separated from them all! Wesley was in constant correspondence with her, a fact which kindled his wife to fury. She stole Wesley's correspondence to satisfy her doubts; she would travel a hundred miles to see who were his companions at a particular stage of his preaching tour. Her fury threw her sometimes into paroxysms of mad violence, and sometimes into acts of almost incredible treachery.

She not only stole her husband's letters; she tampered with them, so as to give them an evil sense, and put them into the hands of his enemies to be published.

Wesley did not show much tact in dealing with his wife. He solemnly, and at infinite length, argued with her; as though a woman, who, like Tennyson's "life," was "a fury slinging flames," was likely to be cured by syllogisms! Queen Victoria once complained that Mr. Gladstone used to address her as though she were a public meeting. Now John Wesley sometimes wrote to his wife as though she had been a crowd at Moorfields or Kingswood. Here is an example:—

"At length, know me, and know yourself. Your enemy I cannot be; but let me be your friend. Suspect me no more, asperse me no more, provoke me no more. Do not any longer contend for mastery, for power, money, or praise. Be content to be a private, insignificant person, known and loved by God and me. Attempt no more to abridge me of my liberty, which I claim by the laws of God and man. Leave me to be governed by God and my own conscience. Then shall I govern you with gentle sway, and show that I do indeed love you even as Christ the Church."

Here is another of Wesley's remonstrances as a husband:

"It might be an unspeakable blessing, that you have a husband who knows your temper and can bear with it; who, after you have tried him numberless ways, laid to his charge things that he knew not, robbed him, betrayed his confidence, revealed his secrets, given him a thousand treacherous wounds, purposely aspersed and murdered his character, and made it your business so to do, under the poor pretence of vindicating your own character—who, I say, after all these provocations, is still willing to forgive you all, to overlook what is past, as if it had not been, and to receive you with open arms; only not while you have a sword in your hand."

On January 23, 1771, there appears the famous entry in Wesley's Journal: "For what cause I know not, my wife set out for Newcastle, purposing, 'never to return.' *Non eam reliqui: non dimisi: non revocabo.*"

It is generally supposed that this *non revocabo* was final, and that from this date Wesley's relations with his wife ceased; but this is by no means the case. The next year his wife, for a brief space of time at least, was with him

again, but once more disappeared beyond the horizon in a whirlwind of passion. Wesley did not call her back, she came back uninvited. In a letter dated May 31, 1774, a letter which is one long scold, she signs herself "your affectionate wife." They were finally parted, however, during the later years of her life. One of the last words Wesley wrote to his wife was in 1778: "If you were to live a thousand years, you could not undo the mischief you have done; and until you have done all you can towards it, I bid you farewell." Wesley records in his Journal on October 12, 1781: "I came to London, and was informed that my wife died on Monday."

Wesley's strange marriage experiment is the tragedy of his life. The woman he chose, to quote Southey, "deserves to be classed in a triad with Xantippe and the wife of Job as one of the three typical bad wives of the world." How did so wise and great a man come to make so unhappy a choice? But if any proof is needed of the heroic fibre of Wesley's character, it is found in the circumstance that, while afflicted with a mere human plague in petticoats like this, it never deflected by a hair's-breadth the work of his life. It did not even cloud his cheerfulness! The husband of this virago was yet able to declare that "he had never suffered from lowness of spirits for a quarter of an hour." Any ordinary man, under such an affliction, would have known little else than lowness of spirits. Perhaps the unconquerable serenity of Wesley's temper was an unacknowledged irritation to his wife. It was a challenge to her gift for making everybody about her miserable.

But it is almost amusing to note how the alchemy of his cheerful faith in the end turned even Wesley's scolding wife into a force for good. He told Moore, one of his assistants, afterwards, "if Mrs. Wesley had been a better wife, he might have been unfaithful in the great work to which God had called him, and might have too much sought to please her according to her own views." This same view is put with humorous directness by John Hampson: "Marriage has sadly crippled Charles Wesley," he wrote to Berridge of Everton, "and would have done the same by John and George (Whitefield) if God had not sent them a brace of ferrets!"

Whitefield, it is to be noted, had a marital experience

not much happier than that of his great comrade, and he deserved his fate. In the letter to the parents of the lady he wished to make his wife, conveying his proposal of marriage, he explains that he wants a mistress for his orphanage, and adds, "You need not be afraid to send me a refusal, for I bless God, if I know anything of my own heart, I am free from that foolish passion the world calls love." A suitor so frigid deserved a shrew for his bride.

# CHAPTER III

## WESLEY IN LITERATURE

It might have seemed, in advance, impossible that Wesley could have filled any serious place in literature. What time had a man, whose study was the saddle, who travelled 4500 miles, and preached 500 sermons every year, for reading books; still less for writing or publishing them?

It may be admitted that Wesley approached literature with less of what may be called the literary spirit than perhaps any other man who ever published so many books. Literature, for him, was not an end in itself; it was not a recreation; it was not a means of winning either money or fame. It was a weapon, caught up for a moment in the heat of a fight, and used like a weapon—so long as the fight lasted. It was a tool, seized for the purpose of doing a bit of urgent work, and to be cast down like a tool, when the work was done. He was a man in haste, and the note of haste—or, at least, of urgency—runs through the whole of his literary work. He writes always like a man who has other, and better, work to do. But some controversy has arisen. It is, for Wesley, an interruption, perhaps even an exasperation; but it has to be dealt with, lest truth should suffer, and souls be wronged. He deals with it in the fewest words, and the shortest possible way, and then hastens on his road. Every sentence he writes is, in a sense, compelled; and the compulsion is always moral.

Wesley's writings may be divided into four classes. Sometimes they are, like his sermons, appeals addressed to the human conscience, and intended to turn men from sin to righteousness. Wesley was the first discoverer of that much criticised form of literature, the "tract," and he anticipated the famous Religious Tract Society by many years. That society was organised in 1799; but,

more than fifty years earlier—in 1742—Wesley was busy printing and circulating thousands of brief, pungent appeals to various classes of wrongdoers: to drunkards, to swearers, to Sabbath-breakers, &c. By means of his helpers, Wesley scattered these earliest of tracts like seed over the soil of the three kingdoms.

Next come his controversial writings. Round Wesley's person, his teaching, his societies, his helpers, gathered a whirling and perpetual simoom of controversy. He troubled too many consciences, violated too many conventions, and stung with rebuke too many prejudices, to be left in peace. Now, Wesley was, both by gift of nature and by force of training, one of the most formidable controversialists that ever lived. He did not, like Dr. Johnson, wield a cudgel or a quarter-staff. His logic had the point, the shining gleam, the deadly swiftness of a rapier. But he hated controversy. He was accustomed to quote an ancient saying, "God made practical divinity necessary, the devil controversial." And yet when truth is assailed, those who love truth must defend it. And when Wesley saw the great and essential doctrines of Christianity, the doctrines by which men must be saved, attacked—and attacked too often by those who ought to have been their defenders—he felt like a soldier who sees the flag of his regiment surrounded by enemies. He must fight!

"Oh, that I might dispute with no man!" he writes. "But if I must dispute," he adds, "let it be with men of sense." But, alas! Wesley's opponents were not often men of sense. One of the most formidable of them, and one whom Wesley smote hardest, was Dr. Lavington, Bishop of Exeter; and of him even a critic so tolerant, and so detached, as Miss Wedgwood, declares in words already quoted: "He deserves to be coupled with the men who flung dead cats and rotten eggs at the Methodists, not with those who assailed their tenets with arguments."

Another section of Wesley's works represents his concern for the instruction of his own people. Himself a scholar, nurtured from his very childhood in an intellectual atmosphere, the Fellow of an historic University, hate of ignorance was, for him, an instinct and a passion. Knowledge and faith, he held, had the closest kinship.

No member of his societies must be allowed to remain untaught. And Wesley deliberately set himself to bring within the reach of his people the best literature the world at that day possessed. He anticipated by more than a century, that is, the age of cheap books and of popular literature. His "Christian Library" represents his most ambitious attempt in this field. He abridged some fifty famous books for this purpose, and the library is a monument to his breadth of spirit. Ancient fathers of the early Church, the greatest Anglican divines, the most famous English Nonconformists, as well as foreign writers like Pascal and Bengel, are found side by side in the list.

The Christian Library was not a financial success; it involved Wesley, indeed, in serious loss; a loss, however, which he made up by the gains on his cheap books. "Two and forty years ago," he writes, "having a desire to furnish poor people with cheaper, shorter, and plainer books than any I had seen, I wrote many small tracts, generally a penny a piece. Some of these had such a sale as I never thought of, and by this means I unawares became rich." Wesley, in a word, made the discovery—which explains some vast modern fortunes—that literature, when it becomes democratic, and takes root amongst the masses, is better than a gold-mine. Wesley's "riches," however, were on a modest scale. His receipts from his books seldom rose to £1000 a year, and every penny was made the servant of some unselfish object. "If I die leaving, after my debts are paid, more than £10," he once wrote, "you may call me a thief."

His anxiety to provide an adequate literature for his own people explains Wesley's printed Sermons, and his Notes on the New Testament. He found, at an early stage of his work, that for the use of his helpers some clear, simple, and definite statement of what may be called the theology of the Revival was needed; and to meet this want he published the first series of his sermons —fifty-three discourses, that still remain the doctrinal standard of his Church. These sermons are not the discourses actually preached, but only their doctrinal framework—a condensed statement of their theology. Wesley says his purpose in writing these sermons was "to furnish plain truth for plain people." In writing

them, he had beside him only two books, the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Testament; and he explains in the preface, "My design is in some sense to forget all that I have ever read in my life." His aim, that is, was to state the great doctrines of evangelical Christianity in the freshest, the most direct, and untechnical language possible.

Wesley published, in all, five series of sermons, and they had an immense sale. But no one need turn to these sermons to-day to find in them the secret of Wesley's own power in the pulpit, or any echoes of the thrilling speech which day after day held vast open-air crowds breathless with interest and emotion. They resemble the spoken sermons only as fossils resemble their living originals.

Wesley's Notes on the New Testament were meant, like his sermons, to be a manual of divinity for his people. The notes were written at tremendous speed, and while Wesley was temporarily forbidden to preach, on account of sickness. The new translation of the text which accompanies the Notes has in it many curious anticipations of the readings adopted by the revisers of 1870.

A record of the various incidents of his career forms another section of Wesley's works. The famous Journal belongs to this class, as does the *Arminian Magazine* started in 1778. Wesley gave to human experience—to spiritual phenomena of every kind—an evidential value which science, only late, and reluctantly, has begun to recognise; and his Journal and Magazine are the most complete, detailed, and scientific records of such phenomena in literature.

Wesley's publications number 371, including 30 works prepared in conjunction with his brother Charles; and as he only began to publish in 1733, this represents an average of more than seven volumes for each year of his busy life. A German historian, in solemn, heavy-handed fashion, groups Wesley's works in five divisions—Poetical, Philological, Philosophical, Historical, and Theological. And they certainly cover an enormous range of subjects, ranging from school-books for Kingswood, hymn-books for his societies, abridgments of countless authors for his people generally, and theological standards for his helpers,

down to a whole battery of controversial pamphlets and treatises.

But do Wesley's works belong to literature in its best sense? Does he possess that great anti-septic, style? Wesley himself would reply, with emphasis, "No." He was no hunter after pretty phrases. He secretes no epigrams. He betrays no sense of the music and grace of words. A white light, hard and clear, beats on every page; but there are none of the subtle colour-effects of the imagination. Wesley's literary ideal consisted of short words, short sentences, and clear thinking. Of his own literary style he writes, in 1788, with honest directness: "I dare no more write in a fine style than wear a fine coat. A man with one foot in the grave must waste no time on ornament. But were it otherwise, had I time to spare, I should still write just as I do. I should purposely decline what many admire—a highly ornamented style. I cannot admire French oratory; I despise it from my heart."

He was an old man when he wrote that self-description. But a quarter of a century earlier (in 1764) he had written:—

"As for me, I never think of my style at all; but just set down the words that come first. Only, when I transcribe anything for the press, then I think it my duty to see every phrase be clear, pure, and proper. Conciseness (which is now, as it were, natural to me) brings *quantum sufficit* of strength. If, after all, I observe any stiff expression, I throw it out, neck and shoulders. Clearness, in particular, is necessary for you and me; because we are to instruct people of the lowest understanding."

Leslie Stephen's criticism of Wesley's writings is interesting, if only as an illustration of Stephen's own limitations as a critic. He cannot judge Wesley fairly because he is parted from him by so wide a theological interval. When he is fresh from reading Wesley he says:—

"He shows remarkable literary power. His writings are means to a direct practical end. . . . It would be difficult to find any letters more direct, forcible, and pithy in expression. He goes straight to the mark without one superfluous flourish. He writes as a man confined within the narrowest limits of time and space,

whose thoughts are so well in hand that he can say everything needful within those limits. The compression gives emphasis and never causes confusion."

These, surely, are literary qualities of great value for their own sake, as well as reflecting a very fine moral temper. But presently Leslie Stephen forgets what he has written; he remembers only his dislike of Wesley's theology, and he says, "Wesley's thoughts run so frequently in the grooves of obsolete theological speculation, that he has succeeded in producing no single book satisfactory in a literary sense." How can writings be at once "means to a direct and practical end" and yet run almost exclusively in "the grooves of obsolete theological speculation"?

The truth is, Wesley has suffered, as far as his literary fame is concerned, much injustice at the hands alike of his critics and of his admirers. He has been both underestimated and over-praised; or rather, he has been praised at the wrong point. His second best work, the famous Journal, has somehow shut out of sight work of much finer literary quality. Leslie Stephen, as we have seen, says that Wesley "never produced a single book satisfactory in a literary sense," and even Mr. Augustine Birrell, who has written one of the most charming of essays on Wesley's Journal, says that as a writer Wesley "has not achieved distinction."

But a hundred critics may be arrayed on the other side. Mr. FitzGerald, of "Omar Khayyam" fame, for example, who has a poet's sense of distinction and charm in style, dwells with delight on the "pure, unaffected, undying English" of Wesley's Journal. Leslie Stephen himself has to admit that Wesley's English is "allied to that of Swift or Arbuthnot," and that his Journal "only wants a little humour to be one of the most entertaining volumes ever written."

Now the charm of the famous Journal is, no doubt, very great. The original records exist in the shape of twenty-one neat, closely written volumes, from which extracts only have been printed. The first entry in the Journal is dated October 18, 1732, and consists of a letter of stupendous length which Wesley wrote defending the little society of

& crept where we could not walk, till between nine & ten a clock; when being heartily tired & thoroughly wet to the Skin, we lay down & slept sound till Morning.

About Day-break on Sun: 29. we spied one of y^e brightest Stars, & resolved to steer straight towards it, as long as it appeared. About 6 we lost sight of our Star, but found ourselves in y^e Great Savannah by Frederica. By this Good Providence, God has I hope delivered me from Another Fear; That of dying in y^e Woods: Wch I find by Experience is (in fair Weather, & to a Person in tolerable Health) a Meer Lion in y^e Way."

I was now in hourly Expectation of setting out for Savannah. Mr Ryad promised to read Evening Prayers in my absence, & 5 or 6 persons agreed to spend an hour together every day, in singing, reading & exhorting one Another. At last, on Thu Sept. 2. y^e Sloop sailed. About 10, on Sund: Morning, we were at Skidoway; whence, after reading Prayers & preaching to about half a dozen people, I set out for Thunderbolt, & thence for Savannah in y^e Afternoon.

Sept. 6. M. Many Complaints being made of what had been done in my Absence, by Mr Dyson, Chaplain of y^e Independent Company, who had now been at Savannah several

*A page from John Wesley's Journal in Georgia.*

London: Published by Smith, Elder, & Co., 15 Waterloo Place, S.W.

Methodists at Oxford from the charge of having helped to kill one of their own number by their excessive austerity of life. The last entry is dated October 24, 1790. The Journal, therefore, covers a period of fifty-eight years. And betwixt those two Octobers, to quote Mr. Augustine Birrell, lies "the most amazing record of human exertion ever penned or endured."

No one will deny the value of the Journal; yet probably nobody could read it through continuously. Mr. Birrell says "an atmosphere of tremendous activity fills it"; but this is hardly true. The notes are too cold and brief. No wind blows through the Journal; no sense of space stirs in it. Only by an effort of deliberate recollection does the reader succeed in realising that beneath the cool and quiet syllables there burns a flame of sustained effort almost without parallel.

In his Journal Wesley records in the briefest fashion the general course of his work and life. He preaches at such a place; the text is given, the result of the service is condensed into a sentence, there is a pious aspiration for a blessing upon it. Then Wesley hurries on his way to another service. There is no perspective in the Journal; no clear background. It gives no sense of the life, so crowded and vivid and strenuous, of which it is a partial record. No echo of the great events in politics, literature, and social life taking place concurrently with the events it records runs through it. This, indeed—its almost complete detachment from the general life of its own times—is the great literary defect of the Journal. The eighteenth century, it must be remembered, resounds with tumult; it is crowded with great events. It begins with the thunders of Blenheim and ends with those of the Nile. Wesley himself was contemporary with four great wars—the war of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748), the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), the war of American Independence (1775–1783), and the first half of the Great War with France (1793–1803). England was at war for thirty years out of the last sixty years of the century. In addition, there was the Jacobite rising of 1715, and the still more famous rising of 1745, with its chain of bloody fights ranging from Prestonpans to Culloden.

Wesley, too, saw Clive win India for England, and

Wolfe win Canada. He saw Captain Cook open for her, not any "perilous seas forlorn," such as Keats describes, but the majestic, many-isled world of the great Pacific; and he saw George Washington take from her the thirteen colonies. Wesley was the contemporary of the two Pitts, of Wilkes, of Junius. The effervescence of the South Sea Bubble was round his youth, and the tumult of the Lord George Gordon riots about his old age. When Voltaire visited England in 1726–1729 Wesley was at Oxford. He saw across the narrow seas the opening of the mighty drama of the Revolution in France. The Whiteboys were filling Ireland with terror in the very years Wesley was traversing Ireland as an evangelist.

And while such great events as these were filling the world with their tumult, Wesley, it must be remembered, was beyond all his contemporaries in contact with people of every class; he knew the common mind intimately, with all its ebb and flow of terror, rage, excitement. It is surely very remarkable, and argues a curious detachment of mind, or an intense preoccupation with greater interests, that his Journal contains such scanty references to these events. No vibration of the agitations or passion of the moment runs through its swift, but ordered, syllables. No one else of that generation, it is certain, could have lived so constantly amongst the crowds, and so completely escaped the contagion of their emotions. No one else could have written a journal of daily events so minute and full, yet so completely divorced from the tumult of battles, the passion of party strife, the dust of contemporary events.

Yet the interest of the book, in spite of all this, is vivid and great. It abounds in curious incidents, in pungent literary judgments, in sudden pictures of odd characters, in records of odd events. It gives us gleams of curious light into the dark places of human life and character. For Wesley was dealing with men and women in high moods of feeling, and saw aspects of human character usually hidden from sight, and sometimes even from consciousness. Wesley believed in Providence as a force in human affairs, and delights to give instances of its working. Human experience was for him a phenomenon to be treated with respect, and recorded with diligence.

It is sometimes said that the Journal supplies many proofs of the credulousness of Wesley, but that is not quite just. He notes all the strange phenomena that come under his observation, but his temper about them is almost scientific, not to say modern. He does not dismiss a strange story because it is strange. "I tell the story as it happened," he says again and again, "let those explain it who can." These are genuine phenomena, and Wesley has a scientific respect for facts.

The true literary quality of the Journal can only be realised when it is put side by side with the other two famous works of the same general type, belonging to the same period—Horace Walpole's "Letters," and Boswell's "Johnson." What other generation of Englishmen yields such a trinity of self-drawn portraits as these three picturesque and strangely contrasted figures!

Walpole and Wesley were contemporaries, and the contrast of their diaries is nothing short of dramatic. Walpole is an idler, a human butterfly. He has no serious business in life; but his lightness, both of touch and of spirit, has a curious charm with it. And still, in the dainty and scented amber of his gossip, lie embalmed for human curiosity the lords and ladies, the rakes and flirts, the fools and spendthrifts of that generation. The very element in which Walpole lives is an atmosphere of malicious gossip. To hear, to tell, to write, all the scandalous stories of his day was his chief occupation; and the sense of the value of his gossip is shown by the care in which he kept copies of his own letters.

Johnson, too, was Wesley's contemporary, and with his courage, his cudgel-like logic, his robust common-sense, his respect for realities, is a more manly figure than Walpole, and has an infinitely better title to human respect. But if Walpole looked on men and women simply for the entertainment they afforded him, and with a remoteness too careless to be scientific; Johnson, on the other hand, valued literature more than men and women, and perhaps he valued politics even more than literature. All men for him were capable of being divided into two classes, to be cudgelled, or to be praised, according as they were Whigs or Tories.

Wesley's standpoint is parted by whole horizons from

that of either Walpole or Johnson. He sees men and women as they stand related to eternity. His temper towards them is not that of a peeping curiosity like Walpole's, nor of vehement resentments and preferences like those of Johnson. It is that of a passionate and divine pity, an untiring concern for their happiness. He has an overpowering sense of the value of men apart from all question of their social standing, their politics, their knowledge or ignorance, their poverty or wealth. He sees them, in a word—as far as such a vision is possible to human eyes—as God sees them!

Wesley's best literary work is not his Journal. It is his famous "Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion." Who wants to know what the English language, at its highest point of clearness and power, is, may well turn to these famous "Appeals." They are unmatched in fire and power; unrivalled in their translucent clearness. The present writer, at least, knows nothing else in the English language to excel them, alike for directness, simplicity, and strength. The clear, terse, hurrying syllables burn with a white flame of conviction. Here is Wesley's style at its best. Swift's fierce syllables burn with a more evil fire; and there is smoke—smoke sometimes as of the pit! —as well as flame in them. Burke has, of course, a more glowing colour, and a wider imaginative range than Wesley. His sentences resemble disintegrated light. But what they gain in colour they lose in simplicity and clearness. Wesley's short, packed, monosyllabic sentences are a perfect medium for the swiftest logic the human brain can shape, and they reflect some of the loftiest emotions the human soul can know.

The "Appeal" shows that Wesley has in him a fine capacity for anger; but his anger only serves to give a new edge to his logic. He is a tremendous disputant. His swift and pitiless logic, because of its very swiftness—its accent of haste—has not seldom the effect of scorn. It cuts like a whip. His reply to Bishop Lavington in the second Appeal is a case in point. Bishop Lavington was a typical Hanoverian divine—fat, drowsy, contented, and as destitute of spiritual sense as a block of wood. He resents, with an anger that has in it a certain note of terror, the "enthusiasm" of the Revival. What is there

in religion to be "enthusiastic" about? He called upon all his clergy to make common cause against the Methodists. He felt about them as a French secularist to-day feels about the clergy. They were the common enemy. They must be suppressed at any cost, and by any methods. Wesley replies to Bishop Lavington's charges in detail, and with infinite patience, and in his closing words he strikes a lofty note. A bishop dealing publicly with a question of religion has great influence. Thousands will accept his utterances. No doubt, Bishop Lavington succeeded in his purpose of "preserving" multitudes from being touched by the forces of the Revival. Wesley acknowledges this, and goes on:—

"My lord, it cannot be long before we shall both drop this house of earth, and stand naked before God. No, nor before we shall see the great white Throne coming down from heaven, and Him that sitteth thereon. On His left hand shall be those who are shortly to dwell in everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. In that number will be all who died in their sins. And, among the rest, those whom you 'preserved' from repentance. Will you then rejoice in your success? The Lord God grant it may not be said in that hour, 'These have perished in their iniquity. But their blood I require at thy hands.'"

Wesley, in literature, was, it must be confessed, a fiddle with one string. He has only one note. In each book, in turn, he sets out from a given point, and for a given end; and he never loiters; he never digresses. The landscape has no interest for him. His only concern is to reach his goal, and to do the precise bit of business in hand. This habit of using literature only as a tool, or as a weapon, of course, gives Wesley a certain narrowness; but it is the virtue of a sword-edge to be narrow! And, behind Wesley's logic, there is always the impact of something stronger than logic, the force of a tremendous personality, of a life occupied in great things, and the channel of great energies. Wesley unconsciously writes and argues like a man who has come down for a moment from some loftier realm, and from the preoccupation of some divine task. And the utter unconsciousness of the mood robs it of all arrogance, and makes the descent both credible and impressive.

# CHAPTER IV

## WESLEY'S ODD OPINIONS

WESLEY'S mind, with its positive and logical turn, easily crystallised into definite opinions; while its qualities of courage and independence gave to many of these an original turn. He was a man of relentless method, and he had a tireless industry in recording everything he saw or experienced. His opinions, as a result, on all sorts of subjects—profane and secular, historical and literary—are scattered with great abundance through his Journal and correspondence. Not seldom they represent hasty judgments, or are built on half knowledge of things; but they are usually marked with great shrewdness, and always by great confidence; and their very positiveness and originality give them very often a look of humour.

On historical characters, for example, Wesley's judgments are marked by great pungency and frankness, and, if generally accepted, would bring to wreck not a few great reputations. He was a good Tory, but he had too much resolute common-sense to cherish any illusion about that "royal martyr" Charles I. "The chief sin which brought the king to the block," Wesley says, "was his persecuting the real Christians." Wesley tells the story of the death of "that monster of cruelty, Graham of Claverhouse, afterwards, as a reward for his execrable villainies, created Lord Dundee." "The tradition current in Scotland," says Wesley, "is: At the battle of Killiecrankie, being armed in steel from head to foot, he was brandishing his sword over his head, and swearing a broad oath, that before the sun went down, he would not leave an Englishman alive. Just then a musket-ball struck him under the arm, at the joints of his armour. Is it enthusiasm to say 'Thus the hand of God rewarded him according to his works'?"

As for Charles II., after reading an account of the

London
Feb. 26. 1780

My Dear Nancy

Have you forgotten the Exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto Children, Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither faint when thou art rebuked of him? Can any thing possibly occur wherein we may not say, "It is the Lord: Let him do what seemeth him Good." In every Circumstance we may adopt our Lord's words, "The Cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" In your Patience then possess your souls. Watch against all unprofitable Reasonings. Hold fast Faith. Whatever Instruments are employed, Sufferings are the Gift of God to You. And they are all intended for your profit, that you may be partakers of his Holiness.

I believe Volatile Tincture of Guaiacum would cure the pain in your face. I do not remember whether I mentioned it before or no. I drop a teaspoonful of it on a lump of Sugar, & take this in a Glass of fair water, fourtimes a day. But it would be likewise well to steep your feet in warm water for some minutes, before you go to bed.

On Monday next I am to set out from Bristol
On Monday fortnight, March 13th I hope to be
at Strand. If it be possible, let me see you there.
No person will be more welcome to

My Dear Nancy

Yours most affectionately

J Wesley

London: Published by Smith, Elder, & Co., 15 Waterloo Place, S.W.

To

Miss Bolton

In Witney

Oxfordshire

X 1 Feb 26 80

sufferings of the Presbyterians in Scotland, during his reign, Wesley writes: "Oh, what a blessed governor was that good-natured man, so-called King Charles II.! Bloody Queen Mary was a lamb, a mere dove, in comparison." "Many of the Protestant Bishops of King Charles," he says again, "had neither more religion or humanity than the Popish Bishops of Queen Mary."

Wesley is ironically sceptical as to St. Patrick and his performances, and the perusal of the life of that saint leaves him under the melancholy conviction that it is a myth, or at least the story "smells strong of romance."

"'I never heard before,' says Wesley, 'of an apostle sleeping thirty-five years, and beginning to preach at threescore. But his success staggers me the most of all. No blood of the martyrs is here; no reproach; no scandal of the Cross; no persecution to those that will live godly. Nothing is to be heard of, from the beginning to the end, but kings, nobles, warriors, bowing down before him. Thousands are converted, without any opposition at all; twelve thousand at one sermon. If these things were so, either there was then no devil in the world, or St. Patrick did not preach the Gospel of Christ.'"

As to the monkish traditions that in the seventh or eighth century Ireland was sown thick with colleges, and the whole island a centre whence piety and learning streamed on wondering mankind; "this," says Wesley bluntly, "ranks with the history of Bel and the Dragon."

Walpole's "Historic Doubts" convinced Wesley that Richard III. was neither a hunchback nor a savage, and he explains the universal tradition to the contrary by saying that, "for fifty years no one could contradict that account but at the peril of his head." Wesley finds time and curiosity enough to visit the Waxworks in Spring Gardens, and reports that most of these royalties show their characters in the countenance, and very unamiable characters, apparently, they exhibit. "Sense and majesty appear in the King of Spain; dulness and sottishness in the King of France; infernal subtlety in the late King of Prussia (as well as in the skeleton Voltaire); calmness and humanity in the Emperor, and King of Portugal; exquisite stupidity in the Prince of Orange; and amazing coarseness, with everything that is unamiable, in the

Czarina." Wesley's views of "that poor injured woman, Mary Queen of Scots," will delight most Scotchmen. He records that Dr. Stuart, in his "History of Scotland," "proves, beyond all possibility of doubt, that the charges against Queen Mary were totally groundless; that she was betrayed basely by her own servants, from the beginning to the end; and that she was not only one of the best princesses then in Europe, but one of the most blameless, yea, and the most pious women!" Of James I., Wesley cherishes the darkest views; "a covetous and bloodthirsty tyrant" is his summary. Of George II., Wesley asks, "Will England ever have a better prince?"

Having strayed by some odd eddy of circumstance into the House of Lords, when the King was present, Wesley draws a picturesque little vignette of him.

"I was in the robe-chamber, adjoining the House of Lords, when the King put on his robes. His brow was much furrowed with age, and quite clouded with care. And is this all the world can give even to a king, all the grandeur it can afford? A blanket of ermine round his shoulders, so heavy and cumbersome he can scarce move under it. An huge heap of borrowed hair, with a few plates of gold and glittering stones upon his head! Alas, what a bauble is human greatness!"

Wesley, on another occasion, spends two or three hours in the House of Lords, and says, "I had frequently heard that this was the most venerable assembly in Europe, but how was I disappointed!"

Wesley's literary judgments are equally positive and unconventional. He has no superstitious regard for great reputations; he thumps them, indeed, with a courage which is always amusing, and sometimes very refreshing. Rousseau he describes as "a shallow yet supercilious infidel, two degrees below Voltaire." "Sure," he cries, "a more consummate coxcomb never saw the sun."

"He is a mere misanthrope; a cynic all over. So, indeed, is his brother-infidel, Voltaire; and well-nigh as great a coxcomb. As to his book, the advices which are good are trite and common, only disguised under new expressions. And those which are new, which are really his own, are lighter than vanity itself. Such discoveries I always expect from those who are too wise to believe their Bibles."

Voltaire's name is made the text of a very amusing discussion on languages. Wesley has read the "Henriade," and as a result he says—

"I was more than ever convinced, that the French is the poorest, meanest language in Europe; that it is no more comparable to the German or Spanish, than a bagpipe is to an organ; and that, with regard to poetry in particular, considering the incorrigible uncouthness of their measure, and their always writing in rhyme (to say nothing of their vile double rhymes, nay, and frequent false rhymes), it is as impossible to write a fine poem in French, as to make fine music upon a Jew's harp!"

Sterne fares badly at John Wesley's hands, as might be expected. Two men more absolutely opposed in temper and genius can hardly be imagined. "The word 'sentimental,'" Wesley says, "is not sense; he might as well have used the word 'continental,'" and the "Sentimental Journey" he sums up in the phrase, "One fool makes many." Where questions of morality are concerned, Wesley's judgment is inexorable. He made a careful study of Macchiavelli's famous and wicked book.

"I weighed the sentiments that were less common; transcribed the passages wherein they were contained; compared one passage with another, and endeavoured to form a cool, impartial judgment. And my cool judgment is, that if all the other doctrines of devils which have been committed to writing since letters were in the world were collected together in one volume, it would fall short of this; and that should a prince form himself by this book, so calmly recommending hypocrisy, treachery, lying, robbery, oppression, adultery, whoredom, and murder of all kinds, Domitian or Nero would be an angel of light compared to that man."

Of an English writer, equally evil in his teaching, Wesley writes—perhaps because he was an Englishman—in yet severer terms. He had read Mandeville's "Fable of the Bees," and finds it more atrocious than Macchiavelli's "Prince."

"The Italian recommends only a few vices, as useful to some particular men, and on some particular occasions; but the Englishman loves and cordially recommends vice of every kind, not only as useful now and then, but as absolutely necessary at all times for all communities!"

But if Wesley is stern against immoral teaching, he is quick to see, and generous to praise, any good even in those most unlike himself. He read "that surprising book the 'Life of Ignatius Loyola,'" and says "he was surely one of the greatest men that ever was engaged in the support of so bad a cause."

The belief that God's mercy was co-extensive with His universe; that sound faith might be hidden beneath the appearance of heresy, and that many will be saved by Christ who never heard the name of Christ, was held by Wesley strongly. Thus he says: "I read to-day part of the meditations of Marcus Antoninus. What a strange emperor! And what a strange heathen! . . . I make no doubt but this is one of those 'many who shall come from the East and the West, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the children of the kingdom, nominal Christians, are shut out.'" On the other hand, he thinks it open to grave doubt "whether Judas claims so hot a place in hell as Alexander the Great!" He plainly holds the greatest soldier of all history was little better than a murderer on a great scale, as "he slew thousands, both in battle, and in and after taking cities, for no other crime than defending their wives and children."

Wesley's judgments of ecclesiastical persons and events are marked by robust good sense. He reads the history of the Puritans, and is able to see both the cruelty of their oppressors and the wrong-headedness of the Puritans themselves. "I stand in amaze, first, at the execrable spirit of persecution which drove these venerable men out of the Church, and with which Queen Elizabeth's clergy were as deeply tinctured as ever Queen Mary's were; secondly, at the weakness of those holy confessors, many of whom spent so much of their time and strength in disputing about surplices and hoods, or kneeling at the Lord's Supper." He reads Baxter's "History of the Councils," and is filled with righteous anger at the story of what Christ's earthly Church has suffered from those who imagined they were serving it.

"What a company of execrable wretches have they been (one cannot justly give them a milder title), who have almost in every

age since St. Cyprian taken upon them to govern the Church! How has one Council been perpetually cursing another, and delivering all over to Satan, whether predecessors or contemporaries, who did not implicitly receive their determinations, though generally trifling, sometimes false, and frequently unintelligible or self-contradictory! Surely Mahometanism was let loose to reform the Christians!"

On some subjects Wesley cherished peculiar views. He believed, for example, that a future life for animals was possible, or even probable. The creatures have suffered in that reign of pain and death which the sin of man has called into existence; why should they not share in the results of man's redemption? The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together; and, says Wesley, "whether men attend or not, their groans are not dispersed in idle air, but enter into the ears of Him Who made them." And this groaning creation "waits for the redemption." "The promise, 'Neither shall there be any more pain,' will take place," says Wesley, "not in man alone, but in every creature according to his capacity; the whole brute creation will be restored to all that they have lost. And what," he asks, "if it should please the all-wise and all-gracious Creator to raise them higher in the scale of beings? What if it should please Him, when He makes us equal to angels, to make them what we are now—creatures capable of God?"

Coleridge adds a somewhat cruel footnote to these sentences. "There is no meaning," he says, "in the word 'them' as applied to flies, fish, worms, &c. If I suffer a door to fall in pieces and put a dog in the passage instead, can I be said to have raised the door into a dog?"

Wesley believed in witches; not in any particular witch, that is, but in the reality, in some cases, of witchcraft. He had persuaded himself, indeed, that to surrender belief in witchcraft would be to quarrel with the authority of the Bible; a circumstance which proves that his logic was not always sufficiently qualified by intelligence.

While in so many respects in advance of his century, Wesley, in brief, in some matters shared its prejudices. It must be remembered that in the eighteenth century his Majesty's judges "believed in witches," and the laws of the realm treated witchcraft as a real and deadly fact,

to be dealt with adequately only by the stake or the gallows. Two witches were executed at Northampton in 1705, and five more in 1712. A woman was executed in Scotland for witchcraft in 1722. When the law took witchcraft seriously enough to hang or burn women supposed to practise the black art, Wesley may be forgiven for believing genuine cases of witchcraft to exist.

Wesley's political opinions were sometimes of an odd complexion. In his famous letter to Lord North on the American troubles he sets out by saying, "I am a High Churchman, the son of a High Churchman, bred up from my childhood in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance," and those words express with perfect accuracy the general bent of Wesley's politics. But his conscience, or his reason, when any adequate occasion arose, broke away completely from the intolerant and stupid Toryism by which Great Britain, through wide spaces of the eighteenth century, was hag-ridden.

On the American trouble, Wesley's publications, it must be admitted, are of a very tangled and contradictory sort, due to the conflict betwixt the original Tory bias inherited from his father, and his own larger and wiser mind. In 1768, in his "Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs," he declared he was not able to defend the measures which had been taken in regard to America. "I doubt," he added, "whether any man can defend them, either on the foot of law, equity, or prudence." But in 1775 he published his "Calm Address to our American Colonies." That address was only Dr. Johnson's pamphlet, "Taxation no Tyranny," slightly abridged, and it reflected Johnson's stubborn Tory prejudices. The discontented Americans, the pamphlet argued, were the descendants of men who either had no votes, or had resigned them by emigration. They had a right to the shelter of the laws, but had no right to any voice in their making. Their only business in the matter of taxes was to pay them. Wesley's pamphlet was for the British Cabinet an immense gain, but for the public generally it was an immense perplexity. Wesley seemed to be guilty of a double offence. He had turned his back on himself; he had stolen Dr. Johnson's thunder.

A Baptist minister named Caleb Evans, a man of in-

telligence and character, produced a new charge against Wesley. He had recommended a certain pamphlet, "An Argument in Defence of the Exclusive Right of the Colonists to Tax Themselves," and now he had himself written a pamphlet in an exactly opposite sense. Wesley denied that he had seen the book, but abundant evidence was produced to show that this was not the case. He had certainly recommended the book to some of his friends. Wesley's own explanation came later, and was sufficiently clear. Writing to a correspondent, he says:—

"I will simply tell you the thing as it is. As I was returning from the Leeds Conference, one gave me the tract which you refer to, part of which I read on my journey. The spirit of it I observed to be admirably good, and I then thought the arguments conclusive. In consequence of which, I suppose (though I do not remember it), I recommended it both to you and others; but I had so entirely forgotten it that, even when it was brought to me the other day, I could not recollect that I had seen it."

This cleared Wesley from one charge, but there remained the undeniable fact that he had published two sets of completely opposite opinions on the American trouble. Wesley explains the matter in a letter so characteristic, alike in its brevity and its frankness, that it deserves to be reproduced:—

"Rev. Sir,—You affirm (1) that I once 'doubted whether the measures taken with respect to America could be defended, either on the foot of law, equity, or prudence.' I did doubt of these five years, nay, indeed, five months ago. You affirm (2) that I 'declared' (last year) 'the Americans were an oppressed, injured people.' I do not remember that I did; but very possibly I might. You affirm (3) that I then 'strongly recommended an argument for the exclusive right of the colonies to tax themselves.' I believe I did; but I am now of another mind."

The Tory in Wesley, in a word, responding to the strident accents of that yet more robust Tory, Dr. Johnson, was now triumphant! And yet, even on the American question, Wesley somehow read the situation, and was able to forecast its issue, better than nearly all the states-

men of his time. There is something of a prophetic strain in his letter to Lord North :—

"Is it common-sense to use force towards the Americans? Whatever has been affirmed, these men will not be frightened, and they will not be conquered easily. Some of our valiant officers say that 'two thousand men will clear America of these rebels.' No, nor twenty thousand, be they rebels or not, not perhaps treble that number. They are strong; they are valiant; they are one and all enthusiasts, enthusiasts for liberty, calm, deliberate enthusiasts. In a short time they will understand discipline as well as their assailants. But you are informed 'they are divided among themselves.' So was poor Rehoboam informed concerning the ten tribes; so was Philip informed concerning the people of the Netherlands. No; they are terribly united; they think they are contending for their wives, children, and liberty. Their supplies are at hand, ours are three thousand miles off. Are we able to conquer the Americans, suppose they are left to themselves? We are not sure of this, nor are we sure that all our neighbours will stand stock-still."

In Wesley's Journal are to be found many curious self-judgments. He watches himself, the play of his own mind, the changes of his own feelings, the effect external things have upon him; and generally contemplates himself with a sort of detached and scientific interest which is amusing. Thus, in his Journal, under date August 8, 1756, he writes, "I find it of great use to be in suspense. It is an excellent means of breaking our will." Wesley knew that—if only as the result of the rush of crowding duties, all clamouring for instant settlement—he ran the risk of hasty decisions. The practice of settling a matter offhand, and too often on half knowledge, grew into a tyrannical habit. So he found a healthful discipline in what to most people is the secret of weakness—the habit of suspense.

Wesley notes, too, the ebb and flow of his own tastes. Here is an entry in his Journal which shows how this busiest of living men, absorbed in the affairs of other people, yet found time to study himself:—

"*Tuesday, July* 3, 1764.—I was reflecting on an odd circumstance which I cannot account for. I never relish a tune at first hearing, not till I have almost learned to sing it; and as I learn it

more perfectly, I gradually lose my relish for it. I observe something similar in poetry; yea, in all the objects of imagination. I seldom relish verses at first hearing. Till I have heard them over and over, they give me no pleasure; and they give me next to none when I have heard them a few times more, so as to be quite familiar. Just so a face or a picture which does not strike me at first, becomes more pleasing as I grow more acquainted with it; but only to a certain point. For when I am too much acquainted, it is no longer pleasing. Oh, how imperfectly do we understand even the machine which we carry about us!"

It is amusing to notice how Wesley finds his very virtues are apt to become his snares. He was the most forgiving of men, but charity itself may become an enervation; and Wesley began to question whether he did not forgive too easily. "Others," he says, "are most assaulted in the weak side of their soul; but with me it is quite otherwise. If I have any strength at all (and I have none but what I have *received*), it is in forgiving injuries. And on this very side I am assaulted, more frequently than on any other. Yet leave me not here one hour to myself, or I shall betray myself and Thee!"

Wesley's habit of exaggerating the importance of the particular evil he was trying to mend finds an amusing illustration in the onslaught he made on that very harmless fluid—tea. He persuaded himself that he had only escaped from an attack of paralysis by giving up tea; and he believed that half the poverty of the nation might be abolished at a stroke, if people would abandon the use of this dangerous fluid. His argument against the use of tea is, in fact, a sort of unconscious burlesque of the logic to-day employed against the use of alcoholic liquors. He represents one obstinate objector saying, "Tea does me no harm; why, then, should I leave it off?" Wesley's reply is that everybody is responsible for his example. A person of cast-iron stomach, capable of resisting the deadly corrosions of tea, might by his example tempt some weak brother to still swallow that poisonous fluid, to his ruin. "You have need," Wesley cries to all his followers, "to abhor it as deadly poison, and to renounce it from this very hour!" Wesley himself gave up the use of tea, and substituted sugar and hot water for twelve years, until Dr. Fothergill, his medical attendant, ordered him to

resume its use. And the author of the tract on tea for the rest of his life was a tea-drinker!

Perhaps the most striking example of Wesley's odd opinions is to be found in the history of Kingswood school. The inspiration to which the school owed its origin was noble. It was meant to be a provision for the children of his helpers. "Was it fit," asked Wesley, "that the children of those who leave home, wife, and all that is dear to save souls from death should want what is needful either for soul or body?" Lady Maxwell supplied the funds for starting Kingswood, and Wesley seized the opportunity for creating what he fondly believed would be an ideal institution—a Christian school, a fountain of Christianised knowledge. No child was to be received over twelve years of age, and only the children of such parents as desired that they should be, "not almost, but altogether, Christians." There was to be a Spartan strain in the school. The children of "tender" parents, Wesley said, had no business there; and every parent was required to give a pledge that he would not take his child from school, "no, not for a day, till he took him for good and all." But Wesley, much as he loved children, did not in the least understand child nature, and he drew up a time-table for the little boys of Kingswood which was admirably calculated to make them either lunatics or hypocrites.

They were to rise at four, winter and summer; each little boy was to spend the hour from four to five in prayer, singing, and self-examination. The humane imagination is distressed as it dwells on the spectacle of twenty-eight little boys, their senses drowsed with sleep, getting up at four o'clock on a bitter winter morning, and spending a whole hour in the process of examining the souls within their shivering little bodies. Then commenced the round of hard work, sustained by plain fare, and unlit by any cheerfulness of play. Wesley, says Southey, had learned a sour German proverb, "He that plays when he is a child will play when he is a man," and he had forgotten the wholesome English saying, the reflex of cheerful common-sense, that "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." No holidays, no games, no boy to be for an instant out of the company of a master—these were not the conditions to produce a healthy and happy boyhood.

As a matter of fact, Kingswood comes next to his own wife in the vexation it caused Wesley. Human nature was in quarrel with his dreadful time-table. He could not get masters to enforce it, or children to survive it. The school began with twenty-eight pupils; and the second year the number had shrunk to eighteen. Out of the eighteen, Wesley records that "four or five of them were very uncommonly wicked"; two had to be dismissed as incorrigible: and five more fled—wise youths! "I spent more money, time, and care on this than almost any design I ever had," says Wesley. "I wonder how I am withheld from dropping the whole design, so many difficulties continually attend it." But it was not in his nature to abandon a plan easily. In 1766 he writes: "I told my whole mind to the masters and servants, and spoke to the children in a far stronger manner than I ever did before. I will kill or cure. I will have one or the other; a Christian school or none at all."

A jury of mothers, empowered to sit in judgment on Wesley's ideas of a Christian school, might have brought in a verdict which would have surprised him. The account of Kingswood given by Adam Clarke, a quite impartial witness, resembles nothing so much as a chapter from the records of "Dotheboys Hall" in "Nicholas Nickleby." But Wesley was reluctant to give up an experiment dear to him. So late as 1783, when the school had been thirty-five years in existence, a resolution of the Conference declares that "either the school should cease, or the rules of it be particularly observed; particularly that the children should never play, and that a master should be always present with them."

The school, no doubt, produced some good scholars, and had a certain fame; and Wesley's indomitable will, at the cost of much youthful suffering, prevailed. Wesley's last reference to Kingswood, indeed, has in it a note of exultation. On September 11, 1789, he writes, "I went over to Kingswood. Sweet recess, where everything now is just as I wish! I spent some time with the children, all of whom behaved well." But if we had a faithful transcript of the letters the poor little boys at Kingswood wrote to their mothers, we might discover that Wesley's "sweet recess" wore, to the unhappy boys who dwelt in it, a very

different aspect. Kingswood School achieved one result its founder never contemplated. It proves that he could, on occasion, blunder as badly as ordinary men. No mother can read the story of the school and quite forgive Wesley. A later and wiser Methodism, it is pleasant to record, has completely transfigured the institution. To-day it reaches Wesley's ends without using his methods.

# CHAPTER V

## THE CLOSING DAY

Wesley had the gift—it might also be described as the art—of clean-blooded health in an unsurpassed degree. Probably nobody was ever better served by his own nerves and senses—by hand and foot, by eye and ear and voice—than he. His voice, it is true, had no organ-like notes, no volume of ear-shattering sound. It was a clear and flexible tenor of flute-like sweetness and carrying power, and with a curious suggestion of authority in it. Wesley tells how once he measured the range his voice could cover. It was clearly audible for a distance of 140 yards. And all Wesley's physical faculties had the same characteristics of elasticity and strength. "A human game-cock," Leslie Stephen calls him. He was short of stature, light of weight, erect and slender. He tells in his Journal how, in the year 1769, "I weighed 122 pounds, and in the year 1783 I weighed not a pound more or a pound less." A man who weighed not quite nine stone had certainly nothing of the impressiveness which belongs to mere bulk; but every fibre of Wesley's slender, erect, little body had a toughness as of tempered steel. Work was for him a tonic. All his faculties grew tougher by dint of intense and incessant use.

And time seemed to have lost its arresting office for this unhasting, unresting figure. His comrades died. One group of helpers after another passed away. A second generation of workers, the children of his original comrades, were about him. Still Wesley moved on his planet-like course, preaching incessantly, writing, reading, administering, travelling through all weathers and on all roads. "Leisure and I," he once said, at the beginning of his career, "have shaken hands." And Time and Wesley had apparently shaken hands too! The flying years whitened his hair, and so gave him a yet more saintlike

look; but they did not quench the sunshine in his eyes, or hush the music in his voice, or chill the fire of his zeal.

Wesley was accustomed, with almost amusing fidelity, to interrogate all his faculties and to record in his Journal—usually on his birthday—the condition in which he found his mind and body—almost as if they belonged to some one else. And so, through the last ten or fifteen years of his life, when he had passed the age at which most men fall into decay, we have successive records of his amazing vitality, and of the changes—or of the absence of change—to be noted in it.

Thus, in 1765, Wesley writes: "I breakfasted with Mr. Whitefield, who seemed to be an old, old man, being fairly worn out in his Master's service, though he has hardly seen fifty years. Yet it pleases God that I, who am now in my sixty-third year, find no disorder, no weakness, no decay, no difference from what I was at five-and-twenty, only that I have fewer teeth, and more grey hairs." Two years afterwards he records how in a single day he travelled 110 miles, and on the road read the "History of Palmyra," and Norden's "Travels in Egypt and Abyssinia."

On June 28, 1774, he inserts in his Journal a characteristic study of his own condition, and the causes which explain a state of health so remarkable:—

"This being my birthday, the first day of my seventy-second year, I was considering, How is this, that I find just the same strength as I did thirty years ago? That my sight is considerably better now, and my nerves firmer than they were then? That I have none of the infirmities of old age, and have lost several I had in my youth? The grand cause is, the good pleasure of God, Who doeth whatsoever pleases Him. The chief means are—1. My constantly rising at four for about fifty years. 2. My generally preaching at five in the morning; one of the most healthy exercises in the world. 3. My never travelling less, by sea and land, than four thousand five hundred miles in a year."

Two years later he writes:—

"I am seventy-three years old, and far abler to preach than I was at twenty-three. What natural means has God used to produce so wonderful an effect? First, continual exercise and change of air; second, rising at four every morning; third, the ability to

sleep at will; fourth, the never losing a night's sleep in my life; fifth, two violent fevers and two deep consumptions (these were rough medicines, but they caused my flesh to come again as the flesh of a little child); lastly, evenness of temper. I feel and grieve, but, by the grace of God, I fret at nothing."

When he was seventy-five years of age, he records how he outwalked the stage coach for five miles on the deep Kentish roads. His record in 1781 is:—

"This day I enter into my seventy-ninth year, and by the grace of God feel no more of the infirmities of age than I did at twenty-nine. I have now preached thrice a day for seven days following, but it is just the same as if it had been but once."

From what strange fountains of strength had this amazing old man drunk!

In 1784 Wesley was in Scotland, in wild weather, and beaten upon by the bitter moor winds. He records that he walked twelve miles without a sense of fatigue—and he was eighty-one years of age! In 1785 he writes:—

"It is now eleven years since I have felt any such thing as weariness. Many times I speak till my voice fails, and I can speak no longer. Frequently I walk till my strength fails, and I can walk no farther. Yet even then I feel no sensation of weariness, but am perfectly easy from head to foot."

In June 1786, when he was eighty-three years old, Wesley travelled seventy-six miles in one day, and preached three times; and he declares that at the end of the day "I was no more tired than when I rose in the morning."

These remarkable entries need perhaps to be slightly discounted. Wesley's memory sometimes failed him. He describes, for example, as one of the causes of his marvellous health, "the never losing a night's sleep in my life." On July 5, 1773, he writes: "This is the first night I ever lay awake in my life, though I had ease in body and mind." "In seventy years," he says, "he had never lost one night's sleep." But his Journal contradicts these statements. Thus on September 10, 1759, he records: "Feverish at night, could not sleep a quarter of an hour, till between two and three in the morning." On July 27, 1767, the entry is, "My cough is so violent at night I could not sleep a quarter of an hour together."

Wesley wisely dwells on one feature of his life commonly overlooked, yet contributing greatly to his general health. There were wide spaces of solitude in all his days. No man ever spent more time amongst crowds than Wesley, yet few lives had wider intervals of healthful and meditative quiet. He writes to a friend:—

"You do not understand my manner of life. . . . It is true, I travel four or five thousand miles in a year. But I generally travel alone in my carriage, and consequently am as retired ten hours in a day as if I was in a wilderness. On other days I never spend less than three hours (frequently ten or twelve) in the day alone. So there are few persons in the kingdom who spend so many hours secluded from all company."

When he was eighty-five Wesley first begins to note signs of decaying strength in himself. His step was not so light, his sight so keen, his memory so sure, as it had been. But, adds the indomitable old man, "I do not feel such a thing as weariness, either in travelling or preaching, and I am not conscious of any decay in writing sermons, which I do as readily and, I believe, as correctly as ever."

But an old man is not always conscious of the changes in himself. Others are better able than he to realise the slower brain, the less assured step, the failing voice. Wesley, as Hampson records, wherever he was, made it a point to preach if he could stand up on his legs; and this was true in his old age. The son of the poet Crabbe, in his father's biography, describes one of Wesley's sermons at this period of his life. He was, he said, "exceedingly old and infirm, and was attended, almost supported, in the pulpit by a young minister on each side. Wesley, in his sermon, drew on his classical recollections. He quoted some lines from Anacreon:—

"Oft am I by women told,
Poor Anacreon! thou grow'st old;
See, thine hairs are falling all,
Poor Anacreon! how they fall!
Whether I grow old or no,
By these signs I do not know;
By this I need not to be told,
'Tis time to live, if I grow old."

Young Crabbe relates that Wesley recited these lines with a mingled fire and pathos that produced the greatest effect.

In his eighty-sixth year (1789) Wesley makes at last, and records, the discovery of quick-coming age. "I now find," he says, "I grow old." If he looked through the coming days of failing strength with forecasting eyes, he might, perhaps, be discouraged. The dulness of a peevish old age—did that await him? But he records, "Thou shalt answer for me, O Lord my God." Then he passes on to his work. A Sunday, which came shortly afterwards, he describes as "a day of rest," because he had to preach only twice! Towards the end of the year he records, "My sight is so decayed that I cannot well read by candle light," but he adds with unconquerable cheerfulness, "I can write as well as ever."

On the first day of 1790, Wesley writes, "I am now an old man, decayed from head to foot. My eyes are dim, my right hand shakes much. I have a lingering fever almost every day; my motion is weak and slow;" but, with characteristic courage, he adds, "I can preach and write still." And he goes on preaching and writing, if with slower step and hand, yet with a spirit as brave, and a face as bright, as in his prime. He wrote to Adam Clarke, who at that moment was ill, to follow his doctor's instructions in everything else except the leaving off preaching. "I think," he adds, "if I had taken this advice many years since, I should not now be a living man."

Nothing is finer in Wesley than the cheerfulness of his spirit, while the tired body and brain were thus yielding to the arresting touch of time. The passage of years whitened his head and dimmed his sight; it made his feet stumble, his hand tremble, and his memory hesitate. But all that was noblest in Wesley—his calm faith, his serene courage, his flame-like zeal, his masterful will—were exactly as in the days of his prime. When he had to be helped by friendly hands along the street or into the pulpit he would repeat with a smile:—

"'Tis time to live, if I grow old."

While time was thus breaking down even Wesley's long-enduring strength his younger brother, Charles, had died,

on March 29, 1788. He was much the more emotional of the two great brothers, and death, as is not uncommon with persons of his temperament, was lit up by no fire of ecstatic gladness. As if by some subtle law of compensation, great joy in the dying hour is sometimes granted to those whose lives have been set in a sombre key, and denied to those who have known frequent ecstasies of joy in the days of healthy life. But Charles Wesley's last moments, if they brought no raptures, were marked by a very sweet and quiet peace; and nothing could well be more perfect as an expression of Christian faith than the last lines the great singer of Methodism wrote:—

> "In age and feebleness extreme,
> Who shall a sinful worm redeem?
> Jesus, my only hope Thou art,
> Strength of my failing flesh and heart.
> Oh, could I catch a smile from Thee,
> And drop into eternity!"

A picture, half amusing and half pathetic, is given of Charles Wesley in his old age by his biographer, Jackson. A little figure with white hair and bent shoulders, clad against winter chills even in the heat of summer, and mounted on a little horse grey with age, taking his daily ride. As he ambled along he would suddenly pluck a card and a pencil from his pocket and begin to write in trembling shorthand the stanzas which were incessantly setting themselves to music in the chambers of his brain. "Not unfrequently," says Jackson, "he has come to the house in City Road, and, having left the pony in the garden in front, he would enter crying out, 'Pen and ink, pen and ink.' These being supplied, he wrote the hymn he had been composing. When this was down he would look round on those present, saluting them with much kindness, give out a hymn, and put all in mind of eternity. He was fond of that stanza upon these occasions:—

> "'There all the ship's company meet
> Who sail with the Saviour beneath,
> With shouting each other they greet,
> And triumph o'er sorrow and death.

The voyage of life's at an end,
The mortal affliction is past,
The age that in Heaven they spend,
For ever and ever shall last.' "

Charles Wesley is perhaps the greatest hymn-writer of the English-speaking race. A poet by force of natural genius, had he never come under the sway of the great forces of religion he would still have left his mark on English literature. Everything with him ran to the music of rhyme almost involuntarily; but his poetry became the servant and instrument of religion, and found its inspiration in the realm of spiritual emotions. And what other poet would not cheerfully sell his fame to make his verse the channel of such enduring power as vibrates in Charles Wesley's hymns! No one who is ignorant of the inner life of Methodism can judge of the value of these hymns. They are the marching songs of a great spiritual host, the channel through which flows, Sunday after Sunday, the worship of ten thousand congregations. They are sung to dying ears and whispered by dying lips. But more than even this can be said of them. They are the creed of Methodism translated into terms of emotion, and set to music. So they help to explain that fine identity of doctrine which binds all the fragments of Methodism, under every sky, and in spite of all diversities of organisation, into spiritual unity.

Charles Wesley, in his hymns, thus rendered to Methodism a priceless service: he crystallised into music the creed for which it stands.

Some creeds, of course, could not be wedded to song or translated into "concord of sweet sounds." Who can so much as imagine an Agnostic hymn-book! Thomson, in his "City of Dreadful Night," has, it is true, set Atheism to music; but the music is a dirge. What Keble did for a single school in the Anglican Church Charles Wesley did for Methodism as a whole. Nay, he drew out into the music of worship and of aspiration the common spiritual consciousness.

Charles Wesley, like all the sons of Susannah Wesley, was a scholar. He had his mother's gift of talking and writing in clearest and tersest English; and, if he had not

his brother's close-knitted intellect, he did a work nearly as lofty and quite as enduring. The epitaph on his grave, written by his own hand, happily expresses his character:—

"With poverty of spirit blest,
Rest, happy saint, in Jesus' rest;
A sinner saved, through grace forgiven,
Redeemed from earth to reign in heaven!
Thy labours of unwearied love,
By thee forgot, are crown'd above;
Crown'd through the mercy of thy Lord
With a free, full, immense reward!"

After Mr. Gladstone's death Lord Salisbury said of him, "He was a great Christian;" but in his use of that phrase he was only quoting unconsciously the words spoken of Charles Wesley by one who knew him best. "He was a great scholar, without ostentation; a great Christian without singularity, and a great divine without the least contempt for the meanest of his brethren."

# CHAPTER VI

## WESLEY'S DEATH

Wesley always insisted on judging religion by the most severely practical tests. Life was one test, and he mistrusted profoundly a religion which did not fill life for its possessor with gladness and strength. But he knew that death, with its mystery and loneliness, was the last and sorest test of religion. Did the religion he preached make that last darkness luminous? Did it put songs on dying lips and gladness in dying hearts? "The world," wrote Wesley, "may not like our Methodists, but the world cannot deny that they die well," and the religion which teaches men to die well may surely find in that fact its best credentials. Lecky writes with a touch of genuine human feeling when he recognises this deep and sacred result of the great revival. "Every religion," he says, "which is worthy of the name must provide some method of consoling men in the first agonies of bereavement, some support in the extremes of pain and sickness, above all, some stay in the hour of death. It must operate, not merely, or mainly, upon the strong and healthy reason, but also in the twilight of the understanding, in the half-lucid intervals that precede death, when the imagination is enfeebled and dislocated, when all the buoyancy and hopefulness of nature is crushed."

Lecky's testimony to the value of evangelical doctrine in that last supreme moment, when the soul stands on the borders of eternity, with the sounds of the busy earth growing faint behind, is not, perhaps, marked by very clear insight, but at least it is emphatic.

"The doctrine of justification by faith," he says, "which diverts the wandering mind from all painful and perplexing retrospect, concentrates the imagination on one Sacred Figure, and persuades the sinner that the sins of a life have, in a moment, been effaced, has enabled thousands to encounter death with perfect calm, or

even with vivid joy, and has consoled innumerable mourners at a time when all the commonplaces of philosophy would appear the idlest of sounds."

The Wesleys themselves, it is quite certain, had the art of dying well. The little, irascible, impatient rector of Epworth himself never wore such an aspect of heroic gladness as in his dying moments. Something of prophetic speech crept to his dying lips. It was as with a ray of sudden vision breaking upon him from the skies of the spiritual world, that he said to John Wesley: "The inward witness, son! the inward witness!—this is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity." No prophet of the Old Testament, and no apostle and saint of the New Testament, ever uttered more pregnant words. A strange light of joy burned in the last moments of that troubled life. He was asked, "Are the consolations of God small with you?" "No, no, no," he whispered, "God chastens me with pain, yea, all my bones with strong pain, but I thank Him for all, I bless Him for all, I love Him for all!" Then as his voice gathered strength he called upon his children who stood round him by name. "Think of heaven! Talk of heaven! All the time is lost when we are not thinking of heaven."

What could be more characteristic of the serene calm of her spirit than Susannah Wesley's last words to the children who stood beside her dying bed. John Wesley tells the story:—

"Her look was calm and serene, and her eyes were fixed upward, as the requiem to her departing soul was being sung by her children. It was just four o'clock. She opened her eyes wide, and fixed them upwards for a moment. Then the lids dropped, and the soul was set at liberty, without one struggle, or groan, or sigh. We stood round the bed, and fulfilled her last request, uttered a little before she lost her speech, 'Children, as soon as I am released, sing a psalm of praise to God.'"

There were many tragedies, as we have seen, in the lives of Wesley's sisters, but with nearly all of them a strange peace lay on their dying beds. As an example, John Wesley's account of the last moments of Patty, perhaps not the cleverest, but certainly the gayest, and perhaps the most ill-fated of the Epworth girls, told in an

earlier page, may be recalled. She died with a triumphant whisper on her lips: "I have the assurance I have so long wanted. Shout!"

Wesley, himself, lived in such a fierce light of publicity —he was the central object of love and of admiring watchfulness to such multitudes—that across more than a century we can watch, as though we were actual spectators, the closing scene in his life. The last sentence he recorded in his Cash-book is still preserved: "For upwards of eighty-six years I have kept my accounts exactly: I will not attempt it any longer, being satisfied with the continual conviction that I save all I can and give all I can; that is, all I have."

That very record—so noble in spirit—gives pathetic evidence of decaying faculties. The characters are faint, broken, and scarcely legible. His memory, as well as his hand, was failing, for there is a mistake in the number of years given. Time for him had plainly lost its perspective. But the record itself is a true reflex of the spirit in which Wesley lived.

His signature of the minutes of the last Conference at which he was present still remains, and yields evidence yet more striking, that the pen was held by strengthless fingers. The letters run irregularly, and Wesley begins the "W" of his surname on the "n" in John. And yet a fortnight after that broken and trembling signature was written, he conducted in Bristol a service three hours long, and afterwards preached in the open air! He went on, indeed, travelling, preaching, toiling, although he was now an image of utter feebleness.

Henry Crabb Robinson relates in his diary how, in October 1790, four months before Wesley's death, he heard him preach in the great round meeting-house at Colchester:—

"He stood in a wide pulpit, and on each side of him stood a minister, and the two held him up, having their hands under his armpits. His feeble voice was barely audible, but his reverend countenance, especially his long white locks, formed a picture never to be forgotten. There was a vast crowd of lovers and admirers. It was for the most part a pantomime, but the pantomime went to the heart. Of the kind, I never saw anything comparable to it in after-life."

Wesley preached his last sermon in the open air at Winchelsea, on October 7, 1790, from the text "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel." He stood under a great tree, with a listening and reverent crowd about him; and when his trembling lips had uttered the benediction, almost the last syllables of the greatest Christian ministry the English race has seen were spoken. And at least a touch of the strange yet familiar power of Wesley's preaching was in that last open-air sermon. "The tears of the people," says one who was present, "flowed in torrents."

The brave, eager spirit within the tired body was, however, still planning new toils. On February 6, Wesley wrote a letter, saying, "On Wednesday, March 17, I purpose, if God permit, to come from Gloucester to Worcester, and on Thursday, 18th, to Stourport." The letter, by accident, was not sent. Wesley discovered it amongst his papers, three weeks afterwards, and, with a touch of his characteristic method, he endorsed it: "February 28. This morning I found this in my bureau." These are the last words that Wesley's pen ever wrote. Two days after he was dead.

Through all these weeks he was conscious that he stood on the threshold of eternity. He closed each service he held with that fine verse of one of his brother's hymns:—

> "O that without a lingering groan
> I may the welcome word receive,
> My body with my charge lay down,
> And cease at once to work and live."

He had one brief, golden, pathetic counsel with which he ended every interview, and every meeting with his societies. It was the Apostle John's great message, "Little children, love one another."

On February 1, 1791, he wrote his last letter to America. His dying message ran: "Declare to all men that the Methodists are one people in all the world, and that it is their full determination so to continue—

> "'Though mountains rise and oceans roll
> To sever us in vain.'"

On February 22 he preached his last discourse in City Road Chapel. His very last sermon was preached in a magistrate's room at Leatherhead, on February 23. The last letter he ever penned was the immortal letter to Wilberforce against slavery.

The best — practically, indeed, the only — account of Wesley's dying moments is that given by Bessie Ritchie, a much-loved and trusted member of his household, who had been his close companion and attendant for some months. A woman's vigilant sense, and quick and tender sympathy, unite in her narrative to give us a story of unmatched simplicity and pathos. That story is a record of one of the most perfect triumphs over death, with its mystery and whispering terrors, a human spirit ever achieved.

"Patience and an easy death" was what Charles Wesley prayed for again and again as the last moments drew on; and these he had. But in his dying moments the clear, exultant note of triumph is not very audible. Through his greater brother's dying accents, however, there runs, clear and deep and loud, the music of triumph. The scene is rich with golden sayings; words which are sometimes a reaffirmation of the great truths he preached in his life, as though the preacher were studying them afresh when set against the great horizons of death. Sometimes they represent sudden gleams of strange vision, such vision as breaks on the dying eyes of God's saints from unseen worlds. Sometimes these sayings are exultant utterances of pure and simple gladness.

On Friday, February 18, he spent the day in reading and writing, and preached at Chelsea at night from the words, "The king's business requireth haste"; but he had to pause again and again during his sermon, till his failing voice gathered strength. It was clear on Saturday that fever was kindling in his wasted veins, but still he wrote and read and worked. On Sunday, the 20th, he was unable to preach, and slept for many hours. On Monday he dined at Twickenham. On Tuesday the indomitable old man preached at City Road, and on Wednesday at Leatherhead. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found," ran his text. It was the great preacher's last message.

He visited a trusted friend, Mr. Woolf, at Balham, on Thursday, but on returning to his house at City Road, on Friday, the look on his face, the manner in which he crept with stumbling feet into the house, showed he was stricken. He struggled with difficulty upstairs into his room, and sat down in his chair. Eager Bessie Ritchie would run for refreshments; but Wesley sent every one out of the room, saying he was not to be interrupted for any one, for half-an-hour, "not even if Joseph Bradford came."

That half-hour of loneliness has a strange pathos about it. Wesley knew that earth was ending, that death was near; and the solitary spirit, standing on the edge of eternity, would brook, for the moment, no earthly companionship. He would talk with God alone, as much alone—and yet as little alone—as Moses on the hilltop in Moab.

Dr. Whitehead, Wesley's trusted friend and physician, was sent for. "Doctor," said the dying man, with a pleasant smile, as the physician entered the room, "they are more afraid than hurt." The next day, however, Joseph Bradford sent a hurried note to each preacher in London. "Mr. Wesley is very ill," it ran, "pray, pray, pray." All Saturday Wesley slept, but on Sunday morning he rose, sat in his chair with a cheerful face, drank a cup of tea, and repeated to those about him, with smiling lips, his brother's verse:—

> "Till glad I lay this body down,
> Thy servant, Lord, attend;
> And, oh, my life of mercy crown
> With a triumphant end."

Speech presently failed him. "Speak to me," he whispered to those about him. "I cannot speak." In a little while he gathered strength again. Eight years before, at Bristol, he was ill, and believed himself to be dying, and he then said to his attendant, Joseph Bradford:—

"I have been reflecting on my past life: I have been wandering up and down between fifty and sixty years, endeavouring, in my poor way, to do a little good to my fellow-creatures; and, now it is probable that here are but a few steps between me and death,

and what have I to trust to for salvation? I can see nothing which I have done or suffered, that will bear looking at. I have no other plea than this:—

"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."

And as he sat in his chair, in the house in City Road, his memory went back to that scene. "There is no need," he whispered, "for more than what I said at Bristol. I said then:—

"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."

Later in the day, after lying silent for some time, as if meditating, he repeated: "How necessary it is for every one to be on the right foundation," and once more he recited the lines, his watchword in the dark valley:—

"I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me."

He slept for a while, and then awakened, and those in the room heard him say, in a low, distinct voice, "There is no way into the holiest but by the blood of Jesus." It was as though, consciously drawing near to that "holiest," he paused for a moment to recall the great and divine act of redemption which constituted his right to enter. All through Wesley's dying moments, indeed, we can see what is the faith, stripped of all merely secondary truths, which stands the supreme test of the last hour.

On Tuesday, March 1, Wesley was asked if he suffered pain. "No," he replied, and then broke into singing:—

"All glory to God in the sky,
And peace upon earth be restored."

He sang two verses of that fine hymn, till his breath failed and his voice was gone. "I want to write," he whispered. A pen was put into his hand, but the fingers could not hold it. "Let me write for you," said Bessie Ritchie, "tell me what you wish to say." "Nothing," was the reply, "but that God is with us."

He insisted on getting up, and while they were arrang-

ing his clothes his voice came back to him, and he broke out singing with a strength and fulness which astonished those in the room. He could preach no longer, write no longer, think and pray no longer. But he could still sing! His failing voice ran into music as if by some eager and resistless impulse. It was the last verse he had given out in City Road Chapel, the exultant stanza:

> "I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,
> And when my voice is lost in death
> Praise shall employ my nobler powers.
> My days of praise shall ne'er be past
> While life and thought and being last,
> Or immortality endures."

It was Wesley's swan-song. Presently, as he sat in the chair, he tried to sing again:—

> "To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
> Who sweetly all agree——"

and then the trembling voice failed. Panting for breath, he said, "Now we have done, let us go." He went back to bed, and, lying there, bade those about him pray and praise. He gave composed directions for his funeral, and after lying silent a little, he whispered, with kindling face, "The best of all is, God is with us." Then, lifting his hand as though to wave it, he cried once more, like a soldier exulting in the moment of victory, "THE BEST OF ALL IS, GOD IS WITH US." One of the most saintly women of that first generation of Methodists, Hester Ann Rogers, came into the room with her husband. "Who are these?" asked Wesley. "Sir," said Rogers, "we are come to rejoice with you; you are going to receive your crown." "It is the Lord's doing," answered the dying man, "and marvellous in our eyes."

All through the night broken accents of praise and adoration fell from his lips. "The clouds drop fatness," he said. "The Lord is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge," "I'll praise—I'll praise——"

On Wednesday morning, at ten o'clock, while a group of faithful and weeping companions stood round his bed, and Joseph Bradford was in the act of praying, Wesley whispered, "Farewell," and his spirit passed away. Joseph

Bradford, at that moment, was repeating the words, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors." Then those in the room broke into singing :—

> "Waiting to receive thy spirit,
> Lo, the Saviour stands above,
> Shows the purchase of His merit,
> Reaches out the crown of love."

Death is the common, inevitable experience, an experience clouded in mystery, and for the natural spirit dark with vague alarms. It is easy, in some moods, to ignore death; to forget its existence; to face it with recklessness. It is possible to drift into that unknown sea with failing senses and no sign of terror. But to die clear-eyed and glad, as Wesley did; to die with trembling lips breaking into praise, and the undying spirit exultant with triumph; to put to that last and uttermost test of death all the beliefs of life, and find that they are true—who does not envy an experience like this?

The keen, swift, unfaltering logic which Wesley used to defend the teaching and beliefs of his life, is not more triumphant and final than the logic hidden in the peace of his death.

# CHAPTER VII

## WESLEY'S CRITICS

It is interesting—it may serve, indeed, to correct the over-estimate of uncritical admirers—to note the aspect Wesley wears when contemplated through unfriendly spectacles. Of the purely domestic biographies of Wesley —lives written by his own followers—no word need be said here; but Wesley has been unfortunate in what may be called his outside biographers. To translate such a career as his into purely literary terms is a difficult task; and an adequate literary representation of the man and his work is not easily discoverable.

Southey's "Life," it is true, is a bit of careful workmanship, showing both skill and industry. But there is a fatal breach of spiritual sympathy betwixt Southey and his subject. He misreads Wesley's character completely, and discovers in a vulgar love of power the explanation of Wesley's amazing toils! Miss Wedgwood's "John Wesley" has incomparably more spiritual insight than Southey's "Life." If Miss Wedgwood has not philosophic penetration, quick, womanly intuition is a very adequate substitute for it. But her work deals inadequately with the facts of Wesley's career; it does not pretend to be either a history or a biography. Isaac Taylor's "Methodism" has still less of either history or biography than Miss Wedgwood's work; it is a mere tangle of misty generalisations. Canon Overton's "Wesley" has about it a pleasant honesty and directness; but it is an attempt to button up John Wesley and his whole work in an Anglican cassock. Snell's "Wesley" is a very inadequate monograph. It has neither facts enough for a biography, nor insight enough for a philosophy.

Leslie Stephen, in his "History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century," gives much space to Wesley and the Revival, and he is, in some respects, the most

formidable critic both of the man and the movement. He has a wide knowledge of the period, though his knowledge has both the merits and the defects which mark a barrister's knowledge of his brief. It is fluent, but external. And Stephen makes no attempt to see the landscape, and to set Wesley and his work in true historical perspective; yet his authority as a critic makes his estimate impressive for the average reader.

On some serious grounds, of course, Sir Leslie Stephen may be challenged in advance, as a competent judge of Wesley and his work. He is disqualified for that office by his own deep-seated prepossessions. He sets out, for example, by dismissing the validity of spiritual phenomena from the realm of intellectual respect. This is as though somebody undertook a criticism of Newton's "Principia," and set out by a quarrel with mathematics. Stephen, too, judges the Revival of the eighteenth century by purely literary tests, and as a contribution to what he calls philosophy. This, again, is as though one judged a specific for the plague by the colour of the label on the bottle which holds it.

In spite of himself, however, Leslie Stephen is betrayed again and again into spacious compliments to Wesley and his work. "Wesleyanism" he calls "the most important phenomenon of the century." Of Wesley himself, he says that "no such leader of men appeared in the eighteenth century"; and yet it is the century of Marlborough; of the two Pitts; of Clive, and of Warren Hastings; of Voltaire; of Frederick the Great, and of George Washington! Stephen is obviously moved to a degree he is reluctant to confess by admiration of Law—with his profound spirituality, his clear vision of eternal things; but he thinks Wesley the more commanding figure. "Law," he says, "retired from the world; Wesley sought to subdue the world."

Yet Leslie Stephen's compliments are spoiled by blunders nothing less than wonderful in a man so able—blunders which argue a sort of intellectual, as well as spiritual, blindness. Thus he says that Wesley's "amazing soundness of health" explains the radiant character of his religion! It would be difficult to discover a more complete example of the inversion of cause and effect

than this. It is like saying that the deep-rooted strength of the oak is due to the acorns which hang from its branches. Wesley's theology, again, he traces to non-theological roots—a performance which shows that Stephen missed the essential keynote of Wesley's character. He says, for example, that he is an Arminian, not on any grounds of reason, but simply "from the instinct of a born ruler of men." His belief at this point is not built on the authority of Scripture, or on the processes of philosophy, but only on "a keen sense of practical efficiency." "He is an Arminian that he may preach repentance."

Such a travesty of Wesley's sermon on "Free Grace" seems to prove that Stephen had never read it. Leslie Stephen indeed betrays an uneasy consciousness that he is wading in waters too deep for his sounding, and dealing with matters beyond the categories of his logic. He confesses, for example, that when criticising Law's writings, he is conscious that he somewhat resembles Mephistopheles in the cathedral!

The summary of the teaching of Wesley and his helpers offered by Leslie Stephen certainly represents a curious completeness of misconception. He undertakes to put himself at the standpoint of the preachers of the Revival:—

"What, they seemed to have tacitly inquired, is the argument which will induce an ignorant miner or a small tradesman in a country town to give up drinking and cock-fighting? The obvious answer was: Tell him that he is going straight to hell-fire to be tortured for all eternity. Preach that consoling truth to him long enough, and vigorously enough, and in a large enough crowd of his fellows, and he may be thrown into a fit of excitement that may form a crisis in his life. Represent God to him by the image most familiar to his imagination as a severe creditor Who won't excuse a farthing of the debt, and Christ as the Benefactor Who has freely offered to clear the score. The doctrine may not be very refined or philosophical; but it is sufficiently congenial to the vague beliefs implanted in his mind by tradition, to give a leverage for your appeals."[1]

Now, almost every sentence in Wesley's "Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" refutes that burlesque of

[1] "History of European Thought," vol. ii. p. 421.

the teaching of the great Revival. We have only to put beside Stephen's travesty Wesley's own statement of the theology he and his helpers taught to see this.

"We see on every side (wrote Wesley), either men of no religion at all, or men of a lifeless, formal religion. We are grieved at the sight, and should greatly rejoice, if by any means we might convince some, that there is a better religion to be attained, a religion worthy of God that gave it. And this we conceive to be no other than love; the love of God and of all mankind, the loving God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, as having first loved us, as the Fountain of all the good we have received, and of all we ever hope to enjoy; and the loving every soul which God hath made, every man on earth, as our own soul.

"This love we believe to be the medicine of life, the never-failing remedy, for all the evils of a disordered world, for all the miseries and vices of men. Wherever this is, there are virtue and happiness, going hand in hand. There is humbleness of mind, gentleness, long-suffering, the whole image of God, and, at the same time, a peace that passeth all understanding, and joy unspeakable and full of glory.

> "'Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind;
> Each prayer accepted, and each wish resigned:
> Desires composed, affections ever even,
> Tears that delight, and sighs that waft to heaven.'

"This religion we long to see established in the world, a religion of love, and joy, and peace, having its seat in the heart, in the inmost soul, but ever showing itself, by its fruits, continually springing forth not only in all innocence (for love worketh no ill to his neighbour), but likewise in every kind of beneficence, spreading virtue and happiness all around it.

"We declare it to all mankind: for we desire not that others should wander out of the way, as we have done before them; but rather that they may profit by our loss, that they may go (though we did not, having then no man to guide us) the straight way to the religion of love, even by faith."[1]

These sentences are sufficient to prove that looking at the teaching of the Revival through Leslie Stephen's account of it, is like contemplating a landscape through a bit of smoked glass.

This, again, is how Leslie Stephen, on philosophical

[1] "Appeal," pp. 1, 2.

grounds, undertakes to explain Methodism, and to predict its failure:—

"The true explanation is to be found in the growth of a great population outside the rusty ecclesiastical machinery. The refuse thus cast aside took fire by spontaneous combustion. The great masses of the untaught and uncared for inherited a tradition of the old theology. As they multiplied and developed, the need of some mode of satisfying the religious instincts became more pressing; and, as the pure sceptics had nothing to say, and the official clergy could only say something in which they did not believe, Wesley's resuscitation of the old creed gave just the necessary impulse. Its want of any direct connection with that speculative movement could not stifle it, but it condemned it to barrenness. Wesleyanism in the eighteenth century represents heat without light—a blind protest of the masses, and a vague feeling after some satisfaction to the instinct which ends only in a recrudescence of obsolete ideas." [1]

Now, as a scientific interpretation of a great historical phenomenon, this explanation is nothing less than childish. The spiritual movement which, to borrow the words of one of the best of English historians, "reformed our prisons, abolished the slave-trade, taught clemency to our penal laws, gave the first impulse to our popular education," is, when translated into the terms of Leslie Stephen's philosophy, nothing more than a certain accidental "accumulation of human refuse" taking fire by "spontaneous combustion." This is like offering the burning of a dung-heap as an explanation of the rise in the Eastern skies of some great planet.

Such a misreading of plain English, on the part of a critic so able, and in purpose so honest, is nothing less than a literary curiosity. But how can a man, himself without spiritual faith, either understand or interpret a movement so intensely spiritual as that of which Wesley is the symbol? Leslie Stephen's sceptical assumptions seem to bring with them a sort of paralysis of the critical faculties.

Stephen, for example, undertakes to describe and assess Wesley's great treatise on "Original Sin." Wesley here is not dealing with a theological abstraction—a puzzle in logic, a problem in philosophy. He is discussing the

[1] "History of European Thought," vol. ii. p. 424.

great central fact in human history—the existence of moral evil; a fact whose witness lies deep in human consciousness itself, and whose record is written on every page of the world's story. Leslie Stephen discovers in the treatise nothing but "a wearisome wrangle over texts with little reference to the deeper philosophical grounds of the problem."

Now, the Bible, on any reading of its character, is the great spiritual text-book of the human race. No other book pierces so deeply into the very heart of the great mystery of human life—the existence of evil. But Leslie Stephen assumes in advance that the Bible on this subject is out of court. Any reference to it may be dismissed as "a wearisome wrangle over texts." The problem is purely philosophical, and is capable of being dealt with only by philosophers; and by philosophers whose chief qualification lies in the fact that they reject the Bible! Theologians do not deserve so much as a hearing in such a cause. Now, this is as if one contended that any reference to the Nautical Almanac in the business of navigation must be an impertinence!

The vice of all such criticism of Wesley and the Revival is to be found in the silent assumption that the intellect, in the only form deserving of respect, must be always on the side of scepticism. Stephen describes, for example, the attitude towards Christianity which the general human mind took in the eighteenth century. "The intellectual," he says, "became sceptical with Hume; the imaginative turned mystics with Law; while those in whom the moral sense and a keen eye for the facts of life were most strongly developed, sympathised with Wesley." But the two later groups are silently dismissed from the "intellectual" realm, and the authority of "intellect" is left with the sceptics! And underlying all Leslie Stephen's criticisms of the Revival, and vitiating them, is the assumption, marked by an arrogance so complete that it is unconscious of itself, that literature is more than religion, and nobler; that the intellect is higher than the conscience; that to write a book is a better title to human fame than to reform a nation; that what cannot be expressed in literary terms, and measured by literary tests, has no title to enduring remembrance.

Fletcher of Madeley, and men of his type, are to be "pitied," because, "while discussing matters which seem to them of importance"—such matters as sin and its remedy; the soul and its relation to God; life and death and judgment to come—"they are really without any adequate system of philosophy." They are unconscious, indeed, that "a philosophy" is necessary; so they are dismissed as belonging to the mere "side-currents of the world's thought"; while Rousseau, Voltaire, Gibbon, and Hume "belong to the main stream of European thought." Wesley's system, we are assured, is pre-doomed to barrenness, because it "has no philosophic basis."

And yet Stephen admits Wesley "founded a body which, eighty years after his death, could boast of 12,000,000 adherents, and whose reaction upon other bodies is fully as important as its direct influence." And what philosopher, it may be asked, has ever performed such a miracle! Now, if Wesley had only spent his life, and employed his intense industry, in spinning some shining web of "philosophy," he might have found a place beside Hume or Gibbon or Voltaire! Instead of wandering in such high realms, Wesley kept to the common earth. His aim, as Leslie Stephen puts it, was "to stamp out vice, to suppress drinking and debauchery, to show men the plain path to heaven, and force them into it by intelligible threats and promises." "He differs," Stephen goes on to explain, "from the ordinary moralists in the strong conviction that a mere collection of good precepts will never change men's lives without an appeal to their feelings and their imagination."

Wesley himself might have accepted the statement that his aim was "to stamp out vice," and "to show men the plain path to heaven"; but he would have protested vehemently that he did not find the energy which was to cleanse human life in any appeal to the mere feeling and imagination of his hearers. He found that healing force in quite another realm; in the spiritual energies which stream from the cross of Jesus Christ, and in the saving offices of the Holy Spirit. And working with these sublime forces he *did* "stamp out vice" in vast multitudes. He did this for more than fifty years; did it on a scale without precedent in English history, and did it

in a fashion so enduring, that to-day great Churches in every land where the English tongue is spoken bear his name. Suppose Hume or Gibbon had been set this task!

This whole criticism of Wesley and his work, like nearly every other literary explanation of the man and his movement yet attempted, is utterly vitiated by the false scale of values on which it proceeds. The greatest forces in human life, however, are not philosophical theories, but moral impulses. And the final standard for men and theories is not intellectual, but ethical.

Which was the nobler figure — the figure which represents the central stream of European thought—Robert Raikes, the Gloucestershire banker, who invented Sunday-schools; or Rousseau, stealing through the darkness of a street in Paris to drop his fifth illegitimate child into the receiving-box of a foundling hospital, and then hastening back to add a new paragraph to his *Contrat Social?*

It is possible to put side by side, as opposing types, men who were contemporaries in the eighteenth century: Hume, weaving metaphysical arguments to prove miracles impossible, and Silas Told, the prisoner's friend, actually working spiritual miracles in the cells of Newgate; Gibbon, writing those famous chapters in his great history for the destruction of Christian faith, and Law, Gibbon's tutor, making Christianity credible, on Gibbon's own testimony, by his life; Rousseau, writing sentimental discourses, while abandoning his own children, and Howard, spending his life in visiting the prisons of Europe, and giving humanity a new authority over the conscience of the race by his example. These are figures in picturesque opposition to each other; and literature reserves its highest honours for one set—for Hume and Gibbon, for Voltaire and Rousseau! Leslie Stephen declares that they, and they only, "belong to the main stream of European thought."

But these judgments proceed, it must be repeated, on a false scale of values. Life is more than speculation; morality is greater than literature. To save a drunkard from his vice, to make a harlot chaste, a wife-beater gentle, a thief honest; to cleanse a city slum, to dry a widow's tears, to shelter a child's helplessness, this is not

merely a better contribution to the world's life than to write the most ingenious philosophical treatise, or to teach words to march in rhyme through the stanzas of a great poem. It represents a loftier order of forces.

Human judgment, to be absolutely true, must reflect the divine judgment. To think as God thinks, to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, to assess all things as by His judgment—this is the last and highest effort of human wisdom. And tried by that great test, who stands higher; Hume or Wesley, Gibbon or Law, Rousseau or Fletcher? Leslie Stephen, and men of his school, vote with the philosophers; but the human conscience stands arrayed on the side of the saints! And the best human intelligence, as soon as it has come to terms with conscience, will be on their side too!

It is interesting to speculate how Wesley would have borne himself had he lived in the hurry and press of the twentieth century. Would his theory of life and religion have stood the challenge of modern problems? How would he have been affected by the criticism which resolves the Bible into a jumble of undated and authorless myths? With what eyes would Wesley have looked, that is to say, on a Rainbow Bible? How would he have dealt with all the new, fermenting unbeliefs, bred of science, or of half-science? Would his faith have been shaken by the biology which links man to the ape; the astronomy that dwarfs the solar system itself to a mere point in the measureless depths of the universe, and sees the earth as an insignificant speck in those awful spaces? How would he have dealt with the secular temper of the present age; the temper which cares very much for this world and leaves the next out of its arithmetic?

It is idle to say that these things do not count. Wesley in the twentieth century would have been a different man from Wesley in the eighteenth century. Leslie Stephen is moved to a sort of angry wonder at Wesley's indifference to what he regards as the victorious attack of Hume and Gibbon on the Christian faith. Although these men were his contemporaries, yet Wesley, he complains, is "as indifferent to the doubts expressed by Hume as if the two men had lived in different hemispheres or centuries." The explanation, of course, lies in the fact that Wesley

lived in a realm where these doubts did not run! He, no doubt, would have agreed with De Quincey's triumphant answer to Hume; but he had a better answer than even that. The logic designed to prove miracles could not happen—or, at least, could not be proved, if they did happen—was idle breath to a man who saw miracles of the highest order—spiritual miracles, that is—happening daily.

And it may be confidently said Wesley would have been unshaken by even the strenuous and many-voiced unbelief of to-day. The larger knowledge of the twentieth century might have altered the accent of his teaching, but not its substance. It might have varied the form of its work; it would not have changed its aim, nor have lessened its energy. He would have fallen back on the triumphant certainties of his own experience. He would have held firm to his belief in the validity of spiritual phenomena, the veracity of the spiritual consciousness. The triumphant logic of the verified results of Christianity would have been for Wesley in the twentieth century—as it was to him in the eighteenth century—the rock on which he stood. God, he would have said, is not a problem to be solved; He is a person to be known; and he would have borrowed Tennyson's fine line—

"Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

He would have claimed that Spirit answers to spirit in us; the living Spirit of God to the believing human spirit.

And Wesley, even amid the tumult and dust of modern life, would have kept in clear vision the eternal perspective of life and duty, which was his characteristic. Duty is more urgent than speculation. We shall not be judged by what we know, but by what we do. Religion has a thousand problems challenging solution; they will challenge solution still, perhaps ten thousand years hence, and in other worlds. But duty is the one luminous point in human life. There are things which are near, urgent, sacred; things as to which no debate is possible—the plain law of obedience; of surrender to God; of faith in

Christ; of service to our fellow-men. Christianity, he would have said, is a realised and supernatural deliverance, to be received by faith; and as to the reality of which our own deepest consciousness can judge. The Bible is not an old almanac, about which the chief thing is the correctness of its dates. The critics, to his clear and earnest eye, would have seemed like men so occupied in discussing the shape of the vessel which carries the living water of truth, and the clay of which it is composed, that they forget the precious draught itself for lack of which the world is perishing.

The Bible, he would have said, on any theory, is a divine revelation; a law of conduct, a chart by which we are to sail. It is not a puzzle to be solved, but a system of precepts to be obeyed. And Wesley would have called on listening crowds to-day in accents as urgent and convinced as he did over a hundred years ago, to accept the message of the divine book, and to shape life by its laws. The principles, in a word, on which Wesley believed and lived and worked in the eighteenth century would, for him, have been just as effective if they had been suddenly transferred to the twentieth century.

# EPILOGUE

## THE CONTINUITY OF SPIRITUAL IMPULSE

It is possible to-day, as it never was before, to set Methodism in the perspective of history; to analyse and assess it; to discover the essential and imperishable characteristics in which lie the secret of its growth. And in the actual illumination of events an answer can be found to the question, what Divine purpose there was, and is, in the Church which Wesley founded?

There is a temptation to define Methodism by negatives. It was not, like the great movement which bears the name of Luther, a theological reformation, a re-discovery of doctrine. It was not, like the English Reformation in the time of Henry VIII., a political movement. It was not like the Scottish Reformation, a quarrel about ecclesiastical theories. But there is no adequate definition in a series of negatives, drawn out to no matter what length.

It is common, again, to fix upon some one special characteristic of Methodism, and offer the part as an explanation of the whole. That Methodism stands for the evangelical, as against the sacerdotal, version of Christianity has become a platitude. That it stands for the concrete, as against the metaphysical reading of theology, is a sister platitude. A creed drawn out in metaphysical propositions is one thing; a creed translated into terms of conduct, verified in the consciousness, a force shaping speech and temper and life, is quite another thing. "Experience" fills a large space in the terminology and literature of Methodism; and "experience" in the Methodist sense means doctrine translated into human and living terms.

Methodism, it is usual to say, stands for spiritual fact as against external form in ecclesiastical affairs; and this is perfectly true. Varieties of Church order—Episcopal

or Presbyterian—belong to the category of secondary values. Methodism, as a matter of fact, flourishes equally well with bishops or without them. The notion that the infinite and all-tender grace of Christ can trickle through an ecclesiastical pipe of only one pattern is, to Methodism, abhorrent. If any one invited the world to believe that the sun shines on flowers of only one tint, the answer would be not merely that such a theory is in quarrel with the whole science of botany. Every cottage garden is its refutation! Every patch of flower-sprinkled grass disproves it. And the theory that God's grace is confined to only one variety of ecclesiastical form is not only in quarrel with the essential genius of Christianity; it is contradicted by the visible facts of the world.

Methodism, again, stands for the imperial as against the parochial temper in Church work. "The world is my parish" was Wesley's immortal phrase; inverting the common rule in which the "parish" becomes the world. The tradition Whitefield and Wesley created when they stepped from the pulpit to the hillside and the street, and began open-air preaching, is its inheritance. It stands, that is, for the aggressive as against the purely apologetic and defensive spirit in Christian service. And it is built on the present, as against the merely historic, theory of the office and power of the Holy Spirit. It believes, as we have already said, that Pentecost was not one particular cluster of hours, in an Eastern city, two thousand years distant. Pentecost lies about us! We are living in it; its airs blow upon us. The fiery tongues are gone, but the spiritual energies of which they were the symbol are the possession of the Church of to-day.

The unconfessed—perhaps the unconscious—but certainly the practical belief of a considerable portion of Christendom, is that the Holy Spirit fell upon the Church once, and shaped its history; but at a given date the Divine Spirit emigrated; and the Church of to-day is left without direct Divine guidance. It can only ascertain what is the will of that great Agent in human redemption by painfully searching amid the dusty records of far-off centuries!

Methodism, it may be added, is pledged to the family theory of Church relationship. Its membership is built on community of speech and experience; on a living and

declared partnership in all the great forces of the spiritual life.

But all such definitions are partial. They express particular aspects of Methodism; they do not reach its central and unifying characteristic. Methodism, first and last, is the re-affirmation of the spiritual element in Christianity. It is the re-emergence in history, and in human consciousness, of the great spiritual forces which are the vital and essential characteristics of Christianity. The name, the machinery, the characteristic beliefs, the household bonds, the practical ideals of Methodism may exist; but they are not in themselves Methodism. They are simply the channels through which, if they are to have any value, must run that vivifying and supernatural impulse, the wave of spiritual energy, which was the essential characteristic of Wesley's work.

And the most impressive feature of that work—that which differentiates it from so many other historic revivals, and is in a special sense the very signature of God upon it—is the unbroken continuity of spiritual impulse which runs through its history. Luther once said that no revival could last more than thirty years. Isaac Taylor extends the term to fifty years. And it has to be frankly admitted that time is a remorseless critic of even religious movements. Its arresting force is visible in the spiritual realm. A great revival is usually linked to a single commanding figure, as, for example, with that of Jonathan Edwards, or of Thomas Finney in America, of the Erskines or McCheyne in Scotland, of Whitefield in England, of Dwight L. Moody in later times, &c. And the revival ends with the individual life; sometimes, indeed, before it. It is a wave that spends itself within some little definite area of time. Rarely does it outrun the span of a generation. A great revivalist, like a great statesman, easily becomes a spent force.

But the feature which separates Wesley's work from other historic revivals is the sustained energy of spiritual force which marks it. This continuity of spiritual impulse ran through the whole term of Wesley's life. His message kept to the very last its power to attract and sway crowds. The stream of conversions under his preaching never ceased to flow. And the movement which began with

Wesley did not die with him. It survived his death. What is much more wonderful, it survived all the ecclesiastical quarrels which broke out amongst his followers after his death. A hundred temporary blunders in policy have not destroyed it. It has persisted in spite of half-a-dozen disruptions. It has run through a whole century since without rest or failure. It burns on with unquenched flame under all skies.

Methodism, it may be claimed, when set in the light of history, satisfies Newman's famous seven tests of the reality of a Church—preservation of type, continuity of principle, power of assimilation, logical sequence, anticipation of the future, conservative action on the past, and —most triumphant of all—undying vitality.

No one can realise the wonder of this sustained energy of life who does not remember how broken, how acrid with ecclesiastical quarrels, has been — through wide spaces, at least—the history of Methodism since its founder died. On all the analogies of history Methodism, when Wesley died, might have been expected to break up into quarrelling fragments, and to have expired in a tangle of schisms. The quarrels came fast and thick. There was one division within seven years of Wesley's death; three in the first twenty-five years after his death; and a fourth a little later, the most tragical of all. The quarrels of 1847–50 cost the parent Church, in four sad years, more members than Wesley gained in forty years. And the divisions of Methodism, speaking generally, have had less justification in reason than any other to be found in the history of Christ's Church. Not one of them represents a protest against doctrinal error, or a struggle for spiritual freedom.

The best way of realising how unnecessary were the divisions of Methodism, how microscopic the questions which gave birth to them, is to consider the aspect they wear to outsiders. Any respectable encyclopædia which tries to express in plain English what is the exact difference betwixt a Wesleyan Methodist, a Primitive Methodist, a Bible Christian, or a United Free Methodist, &c., finds itself simply bankrupt. One of the best English encyclopædias, for example, after an anxious study of the history and characteristics of the Bible Christian Church, says

that "the principal difference" betwixt it and its sister forms of Methodism "seems to be that the Bible Christians take a sitting posture at the Lord's Supper." To resolve the difference betwixt one variety of Methodism and another into the interval betwixt a chair and a hassock is surely very cruel!

A not unfriendly historian, J. R. Green, is puzzled by this evil fertility in divisions which marks one stage of Methodist history, and offers as an explanation the statement that "of all Protestant Churches, Methodism is the most rigid in its organisation, the most despotic in its government." But that statement, if it ever was true, is true no longer!

Some divisions were, no doubt, inevitable in Methodist history; for when Wesley died, no true equipoise betwixt the forces and tendencies within its bounds had been reached. An institution which had felt from its very birth, and for so many years, the pressure of a single masterful hand could hardly develop in a moment the virtues both of flexibility and of self-poised stability. Methodism, too, was affected in its earlier years by the temper of secular politics outside it. The French Revolution, when Wesley lay dying, was beginning to shake, as with the thrust of an earthquake, and almost into ruin, all forms of human society, secular or religious. The influence of that great movement predisposed men for nearly a generation, both to vehemently demand changes, and to vehemently refuse them.

But whatever may be the explanation of the great and quick-following disruptions which rent Wesley's Church asunder, and made it for a time resemble an exploded planet flying in fragments through the ecclesiastical heavens, it might have been predicted with the utmost confidence that these divisions would arrest all spiritual growth. The remarkable circumstance is that this was not the case! The spiritual impulse of Methodism has survived all its schisms. It has characterised in some degree or other each separate fragment. Sea transit has not killed it; new social and geographical environments have not arrested it. Methodism has crossed all the seas of the planet, and taken root on every soil. It has varied its name, its forms, its methods; but under all

its forms, it has kept steadfastly loyal to its original ideal. And everywhere it is marked by that same strange continuity of spiritual impulse.

We have only to set side by side the statistics of Methodism in 1791, when Wesley died, with those of 1891 a century later, to realise this. But the present writer may be forgiven for offering another and a nearer proof of the inextinguishable vitality of Methodism. He belongs to the Australasian branch of Wesley's Church, a branch which had not even begun to exist when Wesley died. It is parted from Wesley himself by more than a century of time, and from the parent Church by twelve thousand miles of sea space. The total population of Australasia is less than the population of London. It is only a handful of people sprinked over a continent.

And yet in this one branch of contemporary Methodism, separated both in time and space so widely from its founder, and from the parent Church, there is, in some respects, a more spacious Methodism than the whole world knew when Wesley died. The members in Australasian class-meetings to-day exceed by 30 per cent. the total membership in Great Britain and Ireland in 1791. There were only 287 Methodist preachers in Great Britain when Wesley died, only 511 in the whole world. There are over 700 Methodist ministers in Australasia alone to-day!

Similar figures might be quoted from Canada and the United States, and they certainly prove the unexhausted life of Methodism. The pulses of that life beat in new lands, in a new century, and amongst new nations. In spite of a thousand human imperfections and mistakes and quarrels, Methodist history since Wesley died is but the translation into historic and visible fact of his dying and triumphant whisper, "The best of all is, God is with us!"

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